Smuggling With Jesus

By HANK COOPER

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my son Aaron and my mother Goldie Kagan from The Khazarian Empire. She was saved from Hitler's death squads by her Uncle Labish, who smuggled himself into America from USSR when he was fourteen years old. I also want to dedicate this book to a Fernando, last name unknown, and who came into my life for unknown reasons. Diane Cohen for supporting me unconditionally and most importantly Bernie.

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Prologue

Smuggling Has Its Perks, if You Don’t Mind (Occasionally) Looking Down the Barrel of a Beretta

At one time or another, everyone has a really bad day.

You’re cut off in traffic by some cell phone yammering idiot and go spinning across two lanes of interstate traffic, landing upside down on the median.

Or you become a victim of identity theft and suddenly don’t have enough credit to buy a grilled cheese sandwich.

Or you have an invective-spewing, words that can

never be taken back, argument with your boss.

God awful? No doubt about it.

But not even in my top 10.

Here’s a bad day for a drug smuggler:

I’m in the Florida Keys. It’s 3:00 in the morning, and I’m sitting in a van, third in line, ready to backup to a private boat dock to load up with pot and then deliver it to a connection in Wisconsin.

This is my first big-time experience with pot. I’m terrified, but if Albert Einstein is right and “the only source of knowledge is experience,” I figure I’m queuing up for a shitload of knowledge.

I watch as the first two trucks back into position and quickly leave after getting something thrown into their vehicles. Now, it’s my turn.

I back in, and someone immediately opens the side door of my van and throws in what looks like a huge sack of ice. Ice? Are we smuggling to contraband Slurpee dealers?

Once five vans are loaded, we’re told to head out, drive around for a while and come back, which I assume must be some kind of practice run.

The house is enormous, like a mansion. It’s set way back at the end of a cul-de-sac, only accessed by entering through a gate with a large arch over it and then driving to the end of a long straight driveway.

We start our vehicles and begin to head toward the

arch, but get only 30 feet before gigantic bright lights blast down on us. A parade of at least a dozen law enforcement vehicles comes barreling down on us, like we're part of a movie set.

The first vehicles through are army jeeps with men hanging from them, all wearing fatigues and with grenades on their hips. Any minute I expect someone to bellow into a megaphone, "Cue the Marines!"

It's a regular smorgasbord of law enforcement groups – Florida State Patrol, local police forces and some guys in plain clothes – all trying to call the shots.

If time seems to slow down in a crisis, I am definitely in a crisis. As if in slow motion, these hyped-up lawmen now seem to glide all over the place, screaming through bullhorns that this is a drug bust and that everyone has to stay exactly where they are. No problem. I'm not going anywhere.

I stare dumbfounded as the guys in the vans ahead of me are pulled out of their vehicles and thrown to the ground by machine gun wielding cops.

My turn next. I hope they'll be more considerate to a nice Jewish Canadian boy like me. But it seems these are equal opportunity jackboots. My door is flung open, and I'm jerked out by one arm and

whipped up against the side of the van head first, with a vice-like grip on the back of my neck and an automatic weapon pressed against my back.

“Do you have any guns, knives or bombs?” he asks.

“No,” I reply.

It turns out that this is a rhetorical question, because he checks anyway. When he doesn’t find guns, knives or bombs, he shoves me to the ground and says, “Stay right there and don’t move, or you’ll most likely be shot.” Compelling argument.

Whenever several different law enforcement agencies are involved at a crime scene, it can get very competitive, each of them vying for dominance. It can become a territorial thing, like dogs marking their territory by peeing. And we’re the territory they’re marking.

Usually the lawmen that have jurisdiction of the property associated with a crime have the lead role. In this case, it’s the local cops, led by a man who is by far the craziest of all the people I’ve known in the past two years. By comparison, he makes Officer Barbrady of South Park seem competent.

He has his five-year-old boy with him on this major drug bust involving what was most likely assumed to be dangerous criminals (i.e. us). How screwed up is

that?

He immediately begins screaming his guts out at us, calling us scumbags and every other vile thing he can think of, seeming to put on a show for his son.

He jams his gun to each of our heads, yelling that he will blow us away if we so much as scratch.

Meanwhile, the men in plain clothes, DEA I figure, are huddled off to the side, furiously talking. Within moments, they tell Officer Barbrady that the vans are filled with nothing but ice, and there isn't a trace of pot in the house, not even a rolling paper.

He goes crazy, whipping his gun out and screaming at us again. Then, like a scene from the movie Deliverance, he thrusts his weapon into the hands of his five-year-old kid and tells him to keep all of us scumbags who are sprawled on the ground covered and, if we move, to shoot us.

Welcome to Pot Smuggling 101!

But what can I say? – It was a bad day.

Here's another one:

I'm 23 years old, living in Toronto. I'm visiting my ex-wife Brenda, who's now living with her new boyfriend, David, a guy she describes as a cross

between a teddy bear and Paul McCartney. After seeing the guy, I'm not sure who should feel more insulted – the Beatle or the stuffed animal. It's probably just stupid jealousy on my part, because once I got to know him. I actually liked him. We're best buddies to this day.

David's family is rich and lives in a large, fancy house. All the local hoods who did the same drugs that he did took advantage, stealing from him and his mother as much as possible. Maybe he'd said something to one of them that he shouldn't have, or perhaps what was about to happen on this day was just the luck of the draw.

In any case, an hour after I arrive, unknown to any of us, three of the craziest and most violent of those hoods are outside on the porch. And, after guzzling down a large bottle of whiskey, kick in the door.

Back in 12th Century Europe, the use of surnames first became popular, and was often a way to identify what a father did for a living, like "Baker," "Cook" or "Hunter." That tradition is obviously alive and well because two of these three maniacs are the Pushey brothers, who make a habit of pushing people around for money. The third idiot is named Larry. The fact that this is also the name of one of the Three Stooges isn't lost on me.

The Pushey brothers and Larry are notorious for

getting wildly drunk and then beating the shit out of all the rich kids with drugs.

I’m not sure who’s in charge of this little home invasion, but I assume it’s the Pushey brother with the knife to my throat, demanding cocaine.

I realize I can probably give in and say, “Okay, I’ll give you some cocaine. Just don’t kill me.” Then they might just take the stuff and let us go.

But the cocaine’s not mine to give. It belongs to my boss, Bernie, who’ll definitely be pissed if I give it up, and might even fire me. If that’s not being a model employee, what is?

So I’m left with hoping the Pushey brother won’t actually slit my throat in front of so many people, even though Larry is yelling for him to do it.

I just keep saying, as meekly as possible, that I don’t know what he’s talking about. I try to give him the impression that, if I knew where to find a large stash of cocaine, I’d definitely give it to him. But I’m starting to lose my cool.

Just as my knees are giving way and I‘m about to crack, lunatic Larry starts eying the latest model Zenith TV that was Brenda’s and my wedding gift from her grandmother.

Larry sneers, “Is that a rental TV?” Being lowlife hoods from the wrong side of the tracks, Larry and the Pushey brothers automatically assume it’s a rented TV. “No,” says Brenda. “My Bubby bought it for me.” She’s so drugged up she doesn’t even know what’s going on.

This is all these maniacs need to hear. They’d been stealing from rich Jews long enough to know that the term “Bubby” means a Jewish grandmother. So the TV was ripe for the picking.

In the blink of an eye, the Pushey brother’s knife comes away from the side of my neck, and he shoves me aside.

Like punks with Attention Deficit Disorder, their attention is suddenly diverted to grabbing the TV and taking it out to their car, forgetting all about the cocaine.

They return long enough for the obligatory warning not to call the cops or, of course, they’ll kill us. We assure them that’s the last thing we’d ever do, and they leave.

Another bad day come and gone.

But smuggling wasn’t all bad days. If it were, I wouldn’t have lasted for fifteen years. Over that time, I travelled all over the world, to some of the

most exotic spots on earth as well as to some of the most primitive.

I was a friend and associate of one of the most fascinating people I've ever known. I met rock stars and celebrities. I've had adrenaline rushes that lasted for days.

And best of all, I've lived to tell about it.

The upshot? – I've had amazing experiences and enjoyed incredible luck in one of the most dangerous professions out there. Sometimes I think it was almost as if some invisible benefactor were travelling beside me, watching over me, keeping me safe.

Like providence. Or a guardian angel. Or maybe even Jesus.

What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?

When asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” No little kid ever says, “A drug smuggler.” Or if he does, he’s just being a wise ass.

I certainly didn’t intend to be a drug smuggler. I was extremely shy, and talked very little, if at all, to adults or even to kids my own age. And although I was likeable enough, I’d have only one friend at a time throughout my life. So I wasn’t exactly Mr. Gregarious.

And I didn’t take a high school Employment Aptitude Test and have a Career Counselor advise me that my

skill set indicated that I’d be a natural in the profession of drug smuggling.

So how does it happen? Is it nature or nurture?

Damned if I know. Maybe a little of both.

Nature:

My Father: I probably got my gambling spirit from my father. When I was young, he would regularly play poker. One night he won 1500 bucks from a man named Ken Eaton. Big money in those days.

In lieu of cash, Ken offered my father a third of an acre of land on one of the Caribbean Leeward Islands in the West Indies. The island was Montserrat, home to approximately 14,000 inhabitants, with about 1000 Americans on the Caribbean side and maybe 100 Canadians on the Atlantic side.

My father accepted Ken's offer and eventually built a house there, which, at that time, was literally one of a handful of homes built on the side of a mountain. It was a good decision – a home in the Caribbean sounds a hell of a lot classier than a wad of cash.

Montserrat was a true paradise, known as the Emerald Isle because of its Irish ancestry and its resemblance to coastal Ireland. I still can't think of a more beautiful and unspoiled place in the

Caribbean.

In 1986, my father sold the place to a real estate agent. It turned out that his gambling instincts were still as sharp as ever. On September 17, 1989, Category 5 Hurricane Hugo struck Montserrat with sustained winds of 160 miles per hour, damaging over 90 percent of the structures on the island. In case you didn't know, with a Category 5, to quote Bob Dylan, "you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows."

Then in July, 1995, just as the island seemed to be getting back on its feet, Montserrat's Soufriere Hills volcano, dormant through recorded history, rumbled to life and erupted. The volcano dominated the southern part of the island where we Canadians had our houses.

A series of violent eruptions, along with major earthquakes, destroyed the island's only town and seaport, Plymouth, burying it in more than 12 meters (39 feet) of volcanic ash, and wiped out the airport and much of the industrial and agricultural land. The southern half of the island became uninhabitable.

Lava burned everything in its path, including my family's old place. Those who witnessed it said our former house just melted, "former" thankfully being the key word here.

Thousands of islanders lost their homes and their livelihoods, and some, their lives. Most were forced to flee. Fortunately, Britain took them in. Only about 2,000 live on Montserrat today.

But before these two disasters of ‘89 and ‘95, our family house in Montserrat was to play a significant role in my smuggling operation – all thanks to a poker hand and my father’s card savvy move from more than a decade before.

Calculating the odds and knowing when to get in and out of a game are key to a gambler’s success. So I guess I also owe those personality traits to my father because my timing in getting in and out of the smuggling game was just about right.

My Mother: I’m a realist. Most likely, that comes from my mother’s side, which was peopled by scientists and philosophers. With that kind of lineage, it’s only natural that I’d develop my own official Philosophy of Smuggling: “Don’t get involved with anyone, take no chances, do your job, and get the hell out as fast as possible.” Sensible. Realistic.

This is probably one of the reasons my boss Bernie and I made such a great team. Bernie worked from

his intuition, a highfalutin way of saying he trusted his gut. He'd take chances that would sometimes leave me terrified of the possible consequences.

Like the time in Bolivia, when all our options for getting $10,000 worth of cocaine out of the country had seemed to disappear. Bernie decided we had no choice but to trust a police officer from Argentina, whom we'd only met two days earlier, for a solution to our predicament. Being a realist, my reaction was, "Are you fucking crazy"?

Every once in a while, I'd break my rule against getting involved with unfamiliar people or getting into questionable situations. It would usually be against my better judgment, and I'd live (fortunately) to regret it. Like that time in Florida when Officer Barbrady and his five-year-old kid worked us over during a pot bust with the help of the Florida State Patrol and the DEA.

I should have remembered – I'm a cocaine smuggler, not a pot smuggler. Completely different worlds. And I'm part of a nice little two-man operation, not a huge organization that involves a headquarters in Miami, a Colombian drug cartel, a mother ship, Cigarette speed boats, and an assembly line distribution process.

My mother also had a surprising sense of adventure, which I may have inherited. She let me keep my

drugs and drug money in the house, and even saved my skin a time or two, or three. It seems she could enjoy an adrenaline rush almost as well as I could.

Uncle Johnny: One of my mother's younger brothers Uncle Johnny was a scientist, specifically a PhD food chemist. He was credited with developing the formula for Lipton’s Instant Cup-a-Soup, while working as a food chemist at the company’s Paramus, New Jersey headquarters.

He would've been a billionaire if he hadn’t quit the company after a dispute. He brought up the fact of the poisonous chemicals Lipton’s was putting in many of their products. And that wasn’t even his biggest achievement, not by a cupful.

Lipton’s Cup-A-Soup is not quite a household name when Uncle Johnny decides to set his sights on Nestle.

At the time, Nestlé is selling an instant “REAL” iced tea product, but something tells Uncle Johnny that that isn’t, in fact, the truth.

Pulling a few favors, he takes several bottles of the powdered Nestlé substance back to the labs at Lipton and runs some tests. Within the hour, he’s taking the elevator up to the VP’s office, and making

a case for producing real “REAL” instant iced tea. Turns out that Nestlé’s REAL iced tea is synthetic.

They promoted him to plant inspector.

Until the next time he bangs on the VPs door.

While the Lipton marketing department is running taste tests with focus groups for their new Lipton Instant Iced Tea, Uncle Johnny begins a small, very small, focus group of his own. Night after night, for weeks on end, he begins feeding a whole bunch of Lipton chemicals to a colony of mice. They seem like the perfect control group – they work cheap, never complain and always show up for work on time.

As a food chemist, Uncle Johnny is used to breaking down compounds, a form of reverse engineering, only to build them back up again into even better compounds. While perfecting the perfect real instant tea and finding that the mice love it, Uncle Johnny is also feeding his mice the secret ingredients that Lipton helped design to enhance taste and preserve freshness.

Taste isn’t the only thing these chemicals enhance – over time, his little rodent associates are coming down with fresh tumors. Lots of them. “They had tumors as fast as I fed them,” Uncle Johnny confides to me years later.

After a period of testing and confirming the link between those secret ingredients and the tumors, Uncle Johnny goes back upstairs to the VP's office and informs him that they're selling cancer to the public. Tasty cancer, but cancer nonetheless. The practice, Uncle Johnny assures the VP, will have devastating effects on future generations.

It turns out that the VP is interested not only in instant tea, but also in instant gratification through instant profits. He tells Uncle Johnny to go back downstairs and, "Do your job."

Uncle Johnny follows his advice. For the next 15 minutes, before telling the corporate suits, "Go fuck yourselves!" Which translates to, "I wish to tender my resignation."

Integrity intact, within a few months, he lands a job with a U.N. hunger program.

After his stint with the U.N., he takes a series of odd jobs, paying him as much as seven hundred bucks an hour. He works several months out of the year and lives a Bohemian lifestyle, traveling all around the world. (Making a lot of money for just a little work? Traveling the world and living the lifestyle of your dreams? Almost sounds like drug smuggling.)

Uncle Johnny probably even enjoys the occasional glass of iced tea. I doubt that it's Lipton's.

Genetically, I may have been the beneficiary of Uncle Johnny's free spirit, his sense of adventure and his adaptability. Maybe even his integrity, as odd as that may sound coming from a smuggler. I was scrupulously honest and never cheated anybody out of anything. Bernie knew he could always trust me.

And, like my uncle, I was also involved in chemistry.

Nurture:

A big part of my career as a drug smuggler can probably be chalked up to personal experiences. Nurture.

And perhaps it started in high school. When I was 16, I was tops in my class in chemistry. So the school sent me for a week to Lever Brothers on a work program so I could find out what it's like out there in the real world.

I found out all right – grim. All I could think of was that this was the last thing in the world I wanted to do for the next fifty years of my life. If this was the real world, I'd like to see what's behind Door #2. Wow! It's Drug Smuggling? Sign me up.

Although it wasn’t quite that easy or obvious, I did make a conscious decision during that week that I’d get out of school and get involved with the real world all right, but in my own way and on my own terms. I determined that I’d just be myself and go with the flow.

My life would be my own unique experiment that I’d conduct on my own testing grounds, not in some Lever Brothers lab. I’d trust in the powers that be, whoever or whatever, to keep me safe and prosperous. My guide would be what I wanted for me, not what some corporate exec wanted from me.

Another factor that contributed to my career choice? – I have trouble saying no to anyone.

My first girlfriend, Brenda, and I had been going together since we were 17. One day, after a couple of years of dating, Brenda announces, out of the blue, that her mother has set a date for an engagement party.

“An engagement party?” I ask. “For whom?”

The answer, of course, is, “Us.”

A year later, her mother is arranging our wedding date. I never asked for or even wanted an engagement party. Now a wedding ceremony? I just never said no.

How about another example? And this is the big one.

Brenda and I split after 18 months of marriage. But it's amicable, and we vow to always stay good friends. You might be tempted to think that the lesson here is to never let a parent arrange your life, like Brenda's mother did mine.

I'm not so sure. Because without that first "not saying no" moment about the engagement and then the marriage, the next "not saying no" moment probably wouldn't have happened. And my life would have been completely different.

Although I never wanted to be married, I still didn't want to be a failure at it. Brenda realizes I'm depressed about the breakup and invites me to a party at her family's home. I'm introduced to a guy named Bernie.

We're both Jewish and 23 years old. We bond almost immediately, and by the end of the party, Bernie asks me if I'd like to work for him. Of course, I say yes, "no" not being in my vocabulary. I don't even ask many details about the job or what I'll be paid.

Then – Wham! – three days later, we're both on a jet to Bolivia to buy $10,000 worth of cocaine (two kilos), which I'll have to sell when we get back to Toronto. I'd never done cocaine before. I'd never sold it to anyone. And I had no clue who would buy

the stuff. On-the-job training, I guess. But what the hell – it wasn't Lever Brothers.

That got the ball rolling. And as I got more and more experience, I got more and more nurturing, you could say. Here are some of the things I learned:

Craving Excitement: I was never quite able to decide whether I actually knew what I was doing, or whether I just never thought of the consequences, or whether, deep down, I thought I could handle anything that came my way. In any case, it made for a stressful life. But I was young, and the stress and fear of what I was doing was worth the excitement and adventure I came to enjoy.

Drug smuggling is incredibly scary in so many different ways. Sometimes I can't believe I'm doing such a ridiculous thing. I guess there's a part of my brain that craves adventure, and overruns the logical thinking part.

So it would seem that the rational ability I got from my mother's side is sometimes trumped by my father's and Uncle Johnny's tendency toward risk-taking as well as my mother's secret adventurous streak.

Drug smuggling can become a game, especially when you're young. You can easily develop a feeling of invulnerability if you don't watch out. And unlike

the game of Monopoly, you don't get a Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free Card.

You just have to get used to the idea that whatever comes next is probably going to be scary as hell. And you'll have to overcome that challenge before the good times begin to roll again. I realized early on that I'd have to become accustomed to this dynamic or quit. But I didn't quit. Not for a long time anyway. The excitement was too addictive. Maybe even more than the drugs.

Playing Stupid: I've used this tactic time and time again till I've perfected it. It no doubt saved my life and kept me out of prison more than once.

The process is simple enough. When I'm getting the third degree, I pretend that the interrogator, whether it's a cop, a district attorney or a Pushey brother, knows nothing about me, and that whatever he thinks he knows about me is completely wrong. I repeatedly tell them they must have the wrong person. I play stupid, as stupid as I possibly can appear. I'm sure there are those who think that, for a drug dealer, this isn't much of a stretch. But it's harder than you think.

Here's an example. But first a little background: From the perspective of a smuggler (i.e. me), most street dealers are nerve racking to deal with, mainly because, if they're convicted, they're only looking at

small trafficking charges, which will usually lead to probation or weekend jail time.

Consequently, these people have little regard for keeping their activities secret. They openly blabber on the phone to set up meetings, and in the process mentioning names, places and times. A disaster waiting to happen.

What the cops actually want is the source (i.e. me). So they'll bully these street dealers into talking so they can move up the supply chain.

One of my sellers, a one-armed guy named Jeff Aaron, has a younger brother, who is a prime example of a street dealer that can screw up your life by sheer association.

Only a few days before Bernie and I are to leave for another Bolivian jaunt, the police come calling on the younger brother because they know he's selling Brother Jeff's cocaine, which came from me. Of course, he gives the police my name, hearing Jeff mention it in the house one day. He figures if he coughs up a name, maybe the police will go away.

As I drive up to my mother's house, I see an undercover cop car in the driveway.

Once I'm inside, three plain-clothes Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP known on the streets as

“The Horsemen”, accuse me of being involved with drugs and demand information. That’s my cue – time to play the dumb shit.

They never believe you at first, but, ultimately, you wear them down. Sure enough, unable to break me and finding no drugs or large stash of money in the house, they leave.

Another example. It’s 1988, and I’m involved in a cocaine deal with two Italian brothers in the auto body business whom I never should have gotten involved with. (See the aforementioned Philosophy of Smuggling: “Don’t get involved with anyone, take no chances, do your job, and get the hell out as fast as possible.”)

I loaned them $10,000, towards a share in a deal to arrange a load of cocaine. It was to be driven from Florida to a northern Michigan border crossing to Ontario, Canada.

We haven’t heard from them in 48 hours, and we’re all worried. I rent a car and drive with the girlfriend of one of the two guys transporting the drugs. They’re supposed to be.in a motel just across the border on the US side. I thought we would take a drive and see if there was anything strange or out of place at the motel.

It looks eerily quiet as we drive up and circle the

empty parking lot. We both get out of the car to look around and stretch, noticing that it appears as if the motel is not even in business.

Suddenly, all the motel room doors burst open, top and bottom levels, men dressed in black charge toward us, aiming guns and yelling the usual warnings at us. Cops, of course.

They demand to know what we're doing here noticing our Canadian license plates.

When we refuse to answer, they load us up in police cars and haul us down to an interrogation area.

One cop is a giant, easily 6 and a half feet tall. He pushes me up against the wall with his fist holding my shirt under my chin, and yells, "You're going to get manda-fucken-tory life in prison, you fucking piece of shit." This is supposed to encourage my cooperation.

I've had experiences with cops from all over the world. They're all different. For instance, Scottish cops treat you like another human being. No one ever yelled at me in a Scottish prison. In fact, they even helped me find a lawyer and a doctor when I asked. By contrast, American cops seem to really get off by humiliating you as much as they possibly can.

After all the yelling and pushing, they throw me in a

cell. I guess to let me think it over and confess the next time they come for me. Which happens many times over the next 72 hours. But I'm not confessing to a damn thing.

Finally, they bring me to the DA's office, where he sits at the head of an ornate boardroom table. This guy's got the coldest blue eyes I've ever seen, truly scary eyes.

I go into my stupid act, sounding like a complete retard. All I say, over and over again, is that I don't have a clue what he's talking about. I was just at the motel because the girl and I were looking for a room. I tried to appear as a man being caught having an affair.

When the DA is sick of being in the same room with me, I'm taken back to my cell, and, after having been locked up for three days, I'm released.

No doubt about it – Playing stupid works.

The Lessons of a Drug Smuggler

Keep Learning: Drug smuggling is like any profession – you have to keep learning. And although there aren't any seminars or continuing education courses, I learn quite a few lessons throughout my career.

Lesson #1. Stay on the Move: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are said to always "Get Their Man." And after they came up dry on the last visit to my mother's house, they told me I was the man they wanted to get.

One way they get their man is to watch you all the time, waiting for you to slip up. Normally that's quite easy, since a person has routines and habits that are the same, day in and day out. So I decided to make it impossible for them to ever watch me again.

I began the practice of never sleeping in the same place more than a couple of days at a time. A method used by many top mobsters I've read about, as well as dictators, including Saddam Hussein. I moved often enough that if the police got wind of me being in town, they'd never get a chance to find where I lived. I always kept one step ahead.

Lesson #2 Avoid Surprises: I hate surprises. The ratio of good surprises to bad surprises is pretty horse shit. For every one good surprise – like Fernando the Argentinian police officer and the Peruvian border guard who came through for me and Bernie – there are dozens of horrible surprises. Bad odds. It's not worth it.

The exception to my rule of avoiding surprises, – if I'm the one creating the surprise. For instance, when smuggling some cocaine from Colombia back to North America with Susie and Scott, a couple of 23-year-olds from Northern California, I kept our final travel connection back to the USA confidential. I trusted them, but not necessarily those they may talk to. I don't like to explain more than I have to, preferring to maintain an element of surprise, a tactic I still use to this day.

Lesson #3 Always Be 110%: Sure: Not 100%.but 110%. This is the number one drug smuggling rule from Bruce Fink, a heroin dealer I had teamed up with in the late 70s. Come to think of it, it's not a bad rule for non-smugglers as well. But as with all rules, sometimes we don't remember to follow them.

Bruce and I are in Pakistan, buying heroin, just as we'd been doing for about three years. I'm having breakfast in the Greens Hotel, expecting him to join me any minute as he always does. I spot him heading down the hallway. But he's walking right past the restaurant.

I call out to him, "Bruce, where the hell are you going?"

"I'm leaving you," he replies. "You're on your own now."

I'm stunned. Doesn't a woman says those words to a man? I have no idea what brought this on, but he doesn't tell me. And, of course, I'm terrified because I'll be left all alone in this dangerous place without any support or backup.

But I act cool. (Acting cool in the face of potential disaster is an essential technique for the successful smuggler.)

Bruce is on his way to the airport to catch a Pan Am

flight back to Canada via the United States. I would never take the flight he's going on. But he wanted to get away from me as quickly as possible for some reason. And in so doing he probably booked the next flight out without thinking it through.

Bruce is very cheap, and books the low fare Pan Am flight that departs Peshawar International Airport, and which stops in Frankfurt, Germany on the way to the States. Catching a flight going directly from Pakistan to the US? You might as well wear a sign that says, "Hello, my name is Bruce. I'm smuggling heroin from Pakistan. Please arrest me." Because that's exactly what happens.

When the plane lands, the German authorities are literally waiting right outside the aircraft door. They ask him to come with them for a customs search. They find the heroin, Bruce's lawyer pleads him as an addict, and the Germans give him a light sentence of only two years.

If Bruce had only taken his own advice – think it through and be 110% sure of your plan – it never would have happened.

And probably after three years of safely smuggling heroin, Bruce was feeling a little invincible (See Craving Excitement). Not to mention allowing his jealous emotions interfere in his judgements.

Lesson #4: Caution, caution and then more caution: There have been times when I was confident that Bernie and I had the drugs concealed well enough to safely fly home on a direct flight. But I always wanted more security for more peace of mind. For an extra thousand or two, we could enter Canada or even the USA via the Caribbean. Always a more reliable route.

You could mail your passport, with the stamps of drug exporting countries on it, back home. And then fly to Canada with your driver's license. I thought it was worth the extra cost, and Bernie agreed completely.

This practice would be one of the main reasons I could work for so long and stay safe. In the early years I watched many people try to smuggle on a shoestring. With luck they might make it once, and maybe, just maybe a second or even third time. But eventually most ended up being busted at some airport along their ill-advised route. Because they were treating it as if they were taking a cheap vacation to Europe. Remember Bruce from Rule #3? A cheap Pan Am flight cost him two years in a German prison.

Many drug dealers can't wait to spend their money on extravagances and luxuries like an expensive new

car. Not me. I drove around in a rental jalopy from Rent-a-Wreck because I wanted anonymity.

The last thing I needed was the flashy pompous look of the other dealers. I figured, let them conduct themselves that way and get busted by the undercover cops, which more frequently than not, happened.

The importance of being cautious was also brought home to me as a result of my ordeal with the Pushey brothers. After having a knife at my throat and being ordered to ante up some cocaine, while lunatic Larry yells for me to be killed, I realize maybe I've been a little too open and trusting. Perhaps I need a more efficient security system in place.

So I line up people to buy my cocaine and initiate an elaborate network where nobody sees or talks to each other. I make anyone dealing with me get a membership at a decrepit downtown YMCA. They each have to get their own locker and lock, to which we would all have the combinations.

This setup was reserved for only the most stable and trustworthy sellers. Plus, I would come by half an hour early to observe every person in the place and try to get a sense of any potential danger or suspicious people lurking about that may resemble law enforcement.

Full disclosure: I actually love steam baths, which is why I picked this particular Y. In the old days there would be a small Jewish owned steam bath almost on every corner of any Jewish neighbourhood. You could get a platza, which is a massage by a fellow Jew who continuously applies a bushel made of oak leaves, which is soaked in a wooden bucket of warm water over your entire body. If I didn't believe in combining business with pleasure, I probably wouldn't be in this profession in the first place.

But, basically, it's all about caution. In fact, my overall rule is to be wary of almost everyone and everything except my mother and Bernie.

In other words, when in doubt, be wary.

Come to think of it, when not in doubt, be wary.

Lesson #5: Respect the Customs of a Country: You can take this two ways. The customs office or the customs/traditions of a country.

Although I didn't respect the customs office enough to stop smuggling, I respected it enough to be super careful. Especially in Bangkok, Thailand, where tourists are greeted with a gigantic sign that says, 'WARNING: Foreign Tourists Thinking of Attempting to Smuggle Heroin, Hashish etc. In or out of The

Kingdom of Thailand Punishment is Death for Thai Citizens and 35 years Imprisonment for Foreigners.' If that doesn't put a damper on your job enjoyment nothing will. Needless to say, I was always extra cautious in Thailand.

As far as respecting the customs and traditions of a country, I learned the importance of this the hard way:

I have a 5:00 a.m. flight the next morning to transport five balls of heroin, shoved up my rectum, out of Bangkok Airport. So I need plenty of rest to have calm nerves the following day. An absolute necessity in my line of work. This is especially true in Thailand, when one little slip up will find me spending the next 35 years in a fly and mosquito infested, malaria prone Thai prison.

But, on this occasion, Bum, my good Thai friend and heroin source has arranged, unbeknownst to me that I stay in a brothel. It was incredibly loud, all night long. For comparison, imagine the noise from the toga party thrown by John Belushi's fraternity in Animal House.

By 5:00 a.m., I haven't had any real rest at all, and am a complete nervous wreck. Going through Thai customs was grueling to say the least. While most western countries are usually not very thorough, in Thailand you go through multiple checks and

searches before you get to the departure area and gates.

I make it through, but on the plane, I write a letter to Bum. I explain that it was a terrible experience and that, next time, I need someplace quieter. I was so mad I may have sounded rather more on the pissed off side.

Three weeks later, I get a letter from a Captain Major, the friend and probably partner of Bum. He was always at important meetings as Bum only spoke Thai and needed his friend the Captain Major as he was introduced to me. Assuming Bum had the Captain Major read my letter, the response was also from him.

In his broken English reply to me he is saying that if he sees me again, he will spit on the street in front of me and cross over to the other side. Sounded to me like a Thai custom or tradition when addressing a despised person.

I realize I have offended Bum and insulted his hospitality. And as non-threatening as the Captain Major's spitting and street-crossing reference might sound, I knew that it could easily mask a seriousness that could escalate into a life or death situation.

Needless to say I never returned to Thailand or saw my good friend Bum again.

And it was totally my fault – I had violated a Thai custom.

But I learned my lesson. When Bruce and I are in Afghanistan, we meet a possible new heroin source for the first time. His name is Nazir Qasi, and when we arrive at his house, the taxi driver rudely honks for him. Nazir comes out, looks us over in disgust and tells us to go away.

Now I'm feeling like crap, as this contact was given to me by another dealer known as Mental. Not a great comfort at this particular moment. We're both sick like dogs and need some heroin now. Luckily Bruce spoke up, and in a begging like tone swore to him that we would never bother him again if he could just give us a small hit each and we'll go away.

Nazir went quickly inside his tiny village house and came back out with a little piece of paper with some heroin inside. I tell him that we're staying at the Greens Hotel if he's willing to give us another chance. And we drive away in the taxi back down to the city of Peshawar below.

Surprisingly, later that afternoon, Nazir calls our hotel room and says that if we would like to come to his house that evening, his wife will cook us a meal. I agree immediately because I'm eager to develop a business relationship with him.

I can’t believe it, he’s giving us another chance, well money means a lot here, and I guess by now he’s picturing those Yankee hundred dollar bills we have tucked away back at the room.

I also know that sharing a meal is a traditional custom of the Afghanis, and refusing a dining invitation is punishable by death if the man wishes. When Nazir comes to pick us up, I’m ready, but Bruce is too drugged up to get out of bed. He politely but stupidly, gives his apologies

I have a delightful meal, Nazir and I cement a business relationship which began a long-lasting friendship that goes on for many years to come.

Five years later. By this time, Bruce has abandoned me, had been arrested in Germany and is serving his two year prison sentence. Nazir confides in me that he has always hated Bruce for refusing to accept that initial meal from his wife. He had actually wanted to have Bruce killed and buried in the mountains, but didn’t do it out of consideration for me, which is a nice segue to another thing I’ve learned.

The Power of Love: I had an unusual edge over other dealers – most people seemed to genuinely like me. Many even loved me and actually worried

about my safety, and not because of any monetary reason. These included not only my family, my ex-wives and my friends, whom you would expect, but also drug contacts in Thailand, Pakistan and pre Taliban Afghanistan.

As a result, even though I was always around extremely dangerous people, I rarely worried about my safety. More than anything, I felt protected. Maybe it was that invisible guardian that seemed to always travel with me.

A few of my smuggling counterparts, who did things similar to me, have died along the way. I believe one of the main things that set me apart from them was that their suppliers, some of whom were also my suppliers, hated them and liked me. As with everything, it's all about relationships, but this business is special like that, where you can and do meet your demise. Sometimes, it's as simple as that.

Of course, even though I was generally well-liked, there always seemed to be someone who wanted to kill me out of jealousy or some weird miscommunication. This was drug smuggling, after all.

But it's not all fiction. I make a point of keeping up on current events, especially when it has something to do with the countries that I'm traveling to.

I learned the hard way that it’s better to know a country is on the verge of a military coup than to wake up one morning with two kilos of cocaine and military police on every corner. And left wondering how the hell to get the cocaine and yourself safely out of the country.

I also like history and archeology. Particularly since my South American excursions gave me the opportunity to visit some of the most important and impressive ruins of ancient civilizations on the planet.

So what’s the final decision? How did I become a drug smuggler? Is it nature? Or nurture? Or both?

Maybe it‘s neither. Maybe it just comes down to a 23-year-old’s search for freedom and happiness. Drug smuggling might seem like an odd career choice for a life of freedom and happiness, but I bet a lot of young guys, and maybe even girls, would prefer that to the drudgery of an office or factory job. I did.

The Trouble With Bernie

This is the story of my first encounter with Bernard Abraham Shull, aka Bernie. It was bizarre right from the get-go, and never descended into what you might call normal.

Bernie grew up in style as a Canadian born Jew in an exclusive section of Toronto.

Although his father was alleged to be a doctor, I never met him, and he was never a subject of conversation around either of our houses.

Bernie loved playing football and won a scholarship

to an American college where he struggled to make the football team. According to him, he was a pretty good player, but the coach never let him play, not even as a relief position. Bernie believed it was because he was a Jew. He was certain the coach was an anti-Semite. Bernie sat on the bench the entire season, without once getting the chance to get out on the field and show his stuff. Basically, he was a glorified practice dummy.

I think it was at this point that Bernie decided to quit school. He didn't feel that he was achieving his goals, and he was determined to get out and see the world. Who knows what would have happened if he'd scored one touchdown or sacked a quarterback?

Bernie allegedly grew up in the same neighbourhood as me, but I never knew or heard of him before, nor had any of my friends.

He had the strangest personality. He was very proper with people, extremely respectful, to the point of seemingly overdoing it at times. But that was just the way he was. He really wasn't trying to impress anybody as far as I could ever tell.

He had a regal look about him, reminding me of someone living in medieval times. He didn't have the appearance of a modern day young man, nor did he think like any other Canadian I knew for that matter. He actually had more of an international kind of a persona or dare I say "out of this world."

But odd or not, everyone noticed him, truly loved him and wanted to be near him as much as possible. Except, of course, his football coach.

I first met Bernie in 1974 at a party in my ex-wife's family home. Since our separation, Brenda is living at her mother's house where we spent our teenage

years hanging out in the den with friends. Experimenting with different drugs while her parents were out bowling with friends or sleeping.

Brenda knows I'm bummed out over our split, so when she and her sisters, Carol and Laney, decide to throw a party, she invites me.

I had been working at her father Harvey's tomato wholesale operation till the end of the summer of '74. Harvey bought me and Brenda a business importing walnuts, pecans etc. from Georgia. We would sell them to the same grocery chain as he sold the tomatoes to. I hated having a business just given to me and gave it back to him and quit. So, when they have their party in early fall, I've been out of work for almost a year.

Brenda thinks I should get out of the house and talk to people. Many of the partygoers are going to be major drug dealers. So I suppose those are the people I'll be talking to.

Most of them are years older than me and are big time dealers into hashish or grass. Bernie is the odd man out at the party because he's my age and his thing is smuggling cocaine. Brenda's nutty younger sister, Elaine, or Laney as we called her, had invited him to the party because she was not only into cocaine, but was also secretly selling Bernie's cocaine for him. She was the only one crazy enough

to sell for an outsider that nobody knew.

Laney introduces me to Bernie because she knows I'm not into cocaine, and figures I won't be a threat to her business relationship with him. But Bernie and I get along great, and by the end of the evening, he asks me if I'd like to take over Laney's job. I'm sure he's well aware that dealing with her can be a nightmare. He never says a bad word about her though.

I'm shocked, but tell him yes, not really considering the long-term implications of such a decision. And even though I'm not quite sure what will be involved and don't know anything about cocaine other than it's white and expensive, I decide that the excitement alone will probably make it worth trying. There's one other reason I agree to join him – if you'll remember, I can never say no.

Things start happening fast. The next day, we go to Bernie's favorite Spanish-speaking travel agent. It's right next door to the world famous El Mocambo nightclub where the Rolling Stones would make random and unannounced cameo appearances. Their Manager is also from Toronto, Brenda and I would buy hash from him when we were sixteen years old. But nobody is supposed to know that or his name, and I will leave that out so he doesn't sue me. Speaking Spanish Bernie arranges to buy airline

tickets to La Paz, Bolivia. For the both of us!

The day after that, we check into an obscure but very ritzy hotel in the lower Forest Hills district of Toronto that I never even knew existed. I've driven taxis off and on since I was sixteen, and was supposedly familiar with all the hotels in the city. But not this place, it's hidden in an exclusive little cul-de-sac.

I find out many famous people, especially rock stars, stay at this hotel when they wish anonymity. I can see why. It's tucked away in one of Toronto's oldest and richest neighbourhoods.

By way of introduction to our product – sort of a sales training seminar, you might call it – we snort cocaine day and night while we complete our plans for the upcoming trip to Bolivia.

It's simple enough. Bernie has the contact there to supply us with cocaine. We then take it back to our Bolivian hotel and package it up for mailing the next morning to Canada. In Canada, Bernie's friend, Ivan, receives it, and notifies us when it is safely in his possession. Then we come back, and I start trying to peddle the stuff.

Sounds good. We go in, do the job quickly and quietly. Then go see the Bolivian tourist sights and have a little fun until we hear from Ivan that the

coast is clear and can come back home. So I say to myself something incredibly ridiculous and naive, namely, “What can possibly go wrong?” Needless to say, I find out.

It’s the middle of the night, and we’re high above the Atlantic Ocean, heading south. Our CP Air flight will soon cross over Central America and then the Pacific Ocean. Heading to Lima, Peru, where we’ll connect for our final destination of La Paz, Bolivia.

It’s a nice comfy flight, with all kinds of classy rich people and businessmen flying between Canada and Peru. The economy section has maybe 50 people. You’d never see that few people these days, but back then, I rode on many long haul flights that sometimes had more crew than passengers.

How those airlines made money was anyone’s guess. No wonder most of the originals are long gone. Maybe they should have considered selling trail mix and charging for luggage.

Bernie eyes a young Peruvian girl who can’t speak a word of English. She’s very pretty and friendly. But she ends up cuddling with me on a row with three seats. She could have stretched out on any empty three seated row she wanted on this half- deserted flight. But she’s content to share a blanket with me and sleep through the long flight. I think I’m going to like this job.

The lights in the cabin come on to snap us out of our slumber, and I untangle myself from the sleeping beauty. Soon we have breakfast and then prepare for landing.

After my Peruvian seatmate and I say our goodbyes and disembark the plane, Bernie and I look for the Lloyd Boliviano Airlines flight to La Paz, Bolivia. A country, along with Haiti, that was loosely classified as a Fifth World country back in the 60s.

Once we find the gate and begin to check in, we realize that we're leaving civilization, as we know it, far behind. There are no classy rich people wearing expensive clothing on this flight. No business looking people either.

The passengers in line are peasant farmers wearing well-worn blue jean overalls, the women, presumably their wives, are rugged looking.

Although they all seem quite friendly, they treat us as novelties, since we're the only two white boys aboard. Actually, they probably are on to something. We are novelties.

But compared to the plane itself and the inside cabin, these peasants seem downright civilized, clean, well-groomed and dressed to the nines. The aircraft is an old rickety Russian airplane that probably undergoes maintenance once a decade,

whether it needs it or not.

Add to this, chickens running loose with steaming pots and containers of food stacked in the aisles, and we've got ourselves a new comedy series – the Bolivian Hillbillies.

Hillbilly even seems a good description, since we're going to be landing at the world's highest airport. It's in the Andes Mountains at an altitude of 13,332 feet. That's a hell of a hill.

Landing in the Andes can't be easy, what with the winds and clouds, but the pilots are used to such conditions, and they put the creaky Russian plane down safely.

The light switches go on in the cabin, and a crewmember makes an announcement as we prepare to disembark, alerting us that the air is very thin at this altitude. We're advised to walk slowly once we get outside the airplane. Until we become acclimatized. A variation of the old, "Don't run with scissors," I guess – "Don't run with little oxygen."

At the bottom of the stairs is an ambulance, no doubt waiting for the two foreigners onboard (i.e. us). The ambulance is certainly not intended for any Bolivians, since they're mostly short and stout, with gigantic chests to take in the thin air. The locals simply bound off, probably happy to be back where

the air isn’t so thick and oppressive.

Although we don’t faint from the high altitude, the air still does a number on us. We breathe in some kind of Bolivian flu bug. By the time we arrive at the hotel, we’re both sick as dogs.

It’s unlike anything we ever experienced before, and our North American bodies do not accept it well. Both of us have wrenching stomach aches, vomiting our guts out and frequently dashing for the toilet to deposit some God-awful tar-like stools. In retrospect, sick dogs have it made. We’re a hell of a lot worse.

Finally, Bernie calls the front desk and, in Spanish, describes our symptoms and asks if they can send up a doctor. Bernie claims the person on the phone makes what sounded like a snicker as he asked for a doctor.

Literally a few minutes later, room service arrives. A young man is standing in the doorway with a tray holding what looks like a pot of tea.

It’s not normal tea to make us feel better. It is real Coca Tea which is sold on every street corner in the city. The irony being that coca leaves are actually the source of cocaine. But no doctor accompanies them. The young man tells us we won’t need a doctor after we drink the coca tea.

Even though we're in utter agony, we still like the idea of being in a country where room service brings you coca leaves and hot water to make tea with. In America, they'd send you up a couple of aspirin. If you're lucky.

We immediately drink some coca tea right away, and, I swear to God, we aren't good as new by morning – we're better than new.

To this day, I have never experienced as effective a medicine as that cup of tea. It almost makes you look forward to being sick.

The current President of Bolivia pleads annually with the United Nations to recognize this simple, organic, pure and cheap medicinal plant. Continually extolling the virtues of his country's herbal pride and joy.

All for naught. The outside world looks at him as if he's crazy, but the people of Bolivia, and now Bernie and I, believe him wholeheartedly.

Bernie comes up with a cover story to explain why we're travelling in the La Paz area. "We'll tell people that we're interested in buying a 500-hectare farm, so we can raise cattle in the Bolivian interior" he says to me.

I'm not quite sure why he came up with that

explanation. I doubt that many people will believe that the dream of two young spoiled Canadian Jew boys is to wallow around in cow shit in a Fifth World country But what do I know?

Enjoying our sudden freedom from the intestinal torments of the Bolivian flu, we set out from the hotel to find Bernie's connection. He's a young man named Edgar, we can buy his cocaine, then package it up and mail it back to Toronto via the Boliviano Postal Services.

We find Edgar in the bazaar where he works. He's a young guitar-loving Bolivian, maybe in his early 20s like us. We covertly arrange to meet him that night at a bar. Edgar scribbles an address on a piece of paper so we can hand it to a taxi driver later.

We have time to kill, so we stop in for some Bolivian barbecue chicken, in what looks like a big old German beer hall.

A big old German beer hall, in Bolivia? How weird is that we thought at first. Not as weird as it seems. The Nazis who escaped the war went down to many countries in South America, like Uruguay, Paraguay and landlocked Bolivia as well it appears.

Unlike many foreign countries that might have a British, French, Spanish or Portuguese connection, this place is definitely Nazi influenced. Being Jewish,

Bernie and I feel a wee bit uncomfortable. But the food at this restaurant is absolutely delicious, so we swallow our discomfort along with our barbecue chicken.

Stuffed to the gills, we head back to the hotel to rest before the cocaine pickup that evening. In the lobby, we meet a couple of hotel guests from Argentina who had checked in while we were out. A young, very tall handsome man named Fernando and his charming mother. The four of us become instant friends, taking walks together and seeing the sites of La Paz.

At one point, I ask, “What brings you two from Argentina to La Paz Bolivia”? A distance of a thousand miles. Well, I guessed, maybe their money would go a long way here.

Fernando says, “My mother and I are looking for a 10,000 hectare piece of land to raise cattle.” Thank God, I don’t have a mouthful of water, or I’d have spewed a shower across the lobby that would have rivaled a tropical downpour.

When I recover, my first thought is, “Oh, great – the same story as ours.” The only difference is 9500 hectares, and they look as if they might actually do it.

My second thought is, “Maybe this budding

friendship isn’t such a good idea. How long before these two figure out that a couple of Canadians travelling in cocaine lab infested Bolivia can only be there for one thing. Cocaine. Let’s just get the cocaine, package it up, send it back home, and get the hell out of here.”

Bernie asks what he did for a living. Fernando tells us he’s a police officer back home in Argentina. Naturally, my reaction is, “Oh, fuck!” Fortunately, I only think this, barely keeping myself from shrieking it out.

I’m sure a sickly smile is frozen on my face, but after a moment, a long moment, I start getting the feeling that perhaps Fernando and his mother had to move away from Argentina, fast, for some reason. Because the idea of a cop and his mother running off to Bolivia to start a new life raising cattle doesn’t quite add up to me. Not quite as bad as two white Canadian Jews, but close. Maybe it’s that sixth sense starting to kick in.

But it’s too late to back off. Bernie just invited them to spend the day with us. So we take a long walk together, talking about the politics of our respective countries. We go to the La Paz markets and visit the local sights together.

Actually, it’s a really pleasant afternoon, even allowing for the fact that it involves a cop and his

mom.

Before long, it’s time to excuse ourselves so we can meet Edgar and get the cocaine. We say goodbye to Fernando and his mother, agreeing to meet them the next morning in the hotel restaurant for breakfast.

We never find out the real reason why they had to make such a big move from Argentina to Bolivia. But by the end of the day, Fernando and his mother seem like genuine friends to us, and we feel no reason to worry. Especially since any future contact with them will be limited to a final breakfast.

Back in our room, Bernie takes out $10,000 US, all in paper-sealed packs, all in nice crispy $100 bills and all with Benjamin Franklin’s face beaming up at us. Then Bernie gives the money to me to keep safe. Gulp.

We go downstairs, get in a cab, hand the cabbie our address slip and go to the bar or coffee house where Edgar’s supposed to be waiting for us.

I’m incredibly nervous. I’ve never been in a situation like this before, namely, carrying $10,000 and on my way to pick up two kilos of cocaine in a primitive, oppressive and probably unstable, South American country.

On the way, Bernie tells me a story. He had been here in La Paz six months earlier, and that he was walking down the street one day, when Military Police asked for his ID. Unfortunately, he'd left his passport at the hotel. He was immediately taken to jail.

The Military Police kept him for five days. Five days! For walking around without his passport in his pocket!

Bernie describes the chilling sounds of people being tortured around-the-clock. He says they never tortured him, and they even gave him food. I think to myself, "Why the hell would you come back? Are you brave as hell? Or fucking nuts?"

As we arrive and step out of the cab, we can hear wild salsa music playing, like fast cocaine music, and we enter the packed bar.

Edgar is waiting at a table and waves us over. Thank God it's dark inside, because we have ten grand to hand over in exchange for a bag of cocaine. Actually, pitch black would have been okay with me.

We talk with Edgar for a bit. Well, Bernie does the talking, since he can speak perfect Spanish. Where he learned Spanish, I have no idea. He never took it in school, French is the only other language taught in Canada, and he had only spent a few weeks in

South America. Another one of those enigmatic things about him.

Then Bernie tells me to pass the ten grand under the table to Edgar. When I do, Edgar slips an airline carry-on bag, with an Air Canada logo on it to me. I think, An Air Canada logo – nice touch.

With the transaction complete, Edgar doesn't want to hang around us anymore. The last thing Edgar needs now is to be associated with two gringos holding two kilos of pure cocaine, and him coincidentally carrying $10,000 in cash. Some people, like cops, could get the wrong idea. So we each leave and go our separate ways.

Back at the hotel, Bernie and I spend the rest of the night and into the early morning snorting cocaine. And packaging up the two kilos for mailing back to Toronto first thing in the morning. What can I say? Busy hands are happy hands.

More of Bernie's idiosyncrasies begin to emerge. Most people, who snort huge amounts of cocaine, display paranoid tendencies. They think people are creeping up on them or something horrible is about to happen. But not Bernie.

His eccentricity comes out in an entirely different way. He took me for a loop. I wasn't expecting this display of lunacy at all.

At one point he grabs a glass and puts it against the wall with the opposite end pressed up to his ear. He's listening for something. He thinks or wants to hear the sounds of people having sex in the next room. Not only that, he keeps trying different spots on the walls of the room to zero in on the best audio quality.

At one point, he's right inside the closet. And he's encouraging me to get my own glass and share the closet with him to listen. I did so just to go along with him. I didn't hear a thing.

We finally bed down, but only get a couple hours of sleep before the alarm clock rings. Bernie gets dressed quickly. He tells me to stay in the room, while he goes to the Post Office, which is just a few blocks down the street.

Bernie decides to go by himself, maybe because he speaks Spanish? I'll never know. I always wondered about that moment.

Did he leave me behind for my safety or as a backup, albeit a practically useless one in the current situation?

I'm relieved it's not me going, but still a little worried for him. He's walking into a Bolivian government building with two kilos of cocaine. Probably amounting to a long prison sentence if he's

caught.

But I keep telling myself that, with any luck, it'll soon be over. The cocaine will be on its way to Canada before I know it. And, if we're caught after that, we'll only have small personal amounts with us and can probably swallow that quickly.

He's not gone long before I'm beginning to feel more at ease, and looking forward to an enjoyable vacation in this landlocked South American country.

That's when Bernie charges back into the room. He's trembling and white-faced, closing the door. He's huffing and puffing with his back up against the closed door and looking wild eyed.

It seems that last night, while we were nice and cozy in our hotel room, snorting cocaine fit for rock stars, and getting the shipment ready for the Post Office, a military coup attempt was playing out its final hours against the President. Keyword being attempt, as it was put down equally as fast.

This morning the streets are filled with troops, shoulder to shoulder. Bernie had somehow gone all the way to the Post Office, entered the building and was even standing in line. The interior of the Post Office was swarming with military officers. They were opening every parcel being sent out that day. Not good.

As quietly and inconspicuously as possible, Bernie turned around and slipped out, making his way back to the hotel. Fortunately, the army is on the lookout for indigenous rebels, not Canadian cocaine smugglers, and he was able to make it back, how in the world I'll never know. With the cocaine!

Suddenly forty years at Lever Brothers isn't sounding so bad. But that quickly passes, and after a few sighs of relief, we order some breakfast and begin talking about Plan B.

Of course, there is no Plan B. We were fortunate enough to have a Plan A. After all, we're just two young, wet-behind-the-ears, business entrepreneurs. Why would we ever expect a military coup attempt to happen the very night before we decide to ship a parcel of cocaine out of the target country?

But Bernie's the boss and will make the final decision on what we do now. Right away he asks me "What do you think we should do"? This kind of scares me. If he doesn't know why the hell should I?

But he's very good about asking my opinion. And then considering all options to try and come up with a solution to our predicament.

After many hours of talking about an alternate method of getting the cocaine back to Canada (all the while snorting tons out of sheer nervousness),

we can’t come up with anything feasible.

Then, Bernie delivers his bombshell. “Hank, what about Fernando? What do you think about asking him for help?” Which elicits my “Are you fucking crazy?” response.

“Bernie,” I continue, my voice probably rising an octave, “we’ve only known this guy for a dozen or so hours. And besides, he’s a fucking cop from Argentina. How do we know he won’t turn us over to the local authorities and get a promotion out of the deal”?

I go on and on about it being too risky to involve anyone, let alone a cop traveling with his proper little mother. We actually argue fiercely about this for almost an hour, and we rarely, if ever, argued about anything over the eight years I knew him.

But Bernie doesn’t yield. He says he wants to ask Fernando to somehow help us. I’m thinking “Why would you even think of this, what the hell can he possibly do”?

“How’s he going to help us?” I ask. “And why would he want to get involved with a couple of Canadian drug dealers? Especially while he’s here with his mother.”

It just sounds too outlandish to me, but I’m no

longer scared about the idea. I'm now terrified. It sounds like a recipe for disaster.

Probably realizing I'm starting to freak out about it, Bernie says, "Let's go eat dinner and think about it over a nice meal."

We go upstairs to the rooftop restaurant, where we're the only customers. We order the rainbow trout that comes from Lake Titicaca. Which just happens to be near the border of Peru and Bolivia. At an altitude of 12,500 feet.

I'm still nervous as hell, but I have to admit, dinner was a great idea. The trout was incredibly fresh and amazingly delicious. Where else can you get a rainbow trout from such a pristine clean lake atop an Andes mountain?

Bernie is still completely stuck on Fernando being our way out of this mess. He says he has a good feeling about him, and he's going to go with that feeling. And he'd like me to be more or less comfortable about the decision as well. Good luck with that.

After our dinner, we go back to our room where I argue my case one last time. After Bernie lets me have my say he announces that he's going up to Fernando's room before it gets too late and ask him to come down to our room for a chat. And off he

goes. What can I say? He’s the boss.

Within moments, Bernie is back in our room with Fernando. The three of us sit down, light up some Marlboros and drink Bolivian coffee.

Bernie and I glance at each other, uncertain about how to broach the subject. After a few moments of silence, Bernie speaks up, “Fernando, Hank and I have a big problem.”

Fernando says, “Go ahead and tell me. I will listen.”

Bernie replies, “We’re really not here in La Paz to buy a farm and setup a cattle business. We’re actually smuggling cocaine to Canada by mail. Because of the attempted coup last night, the Post Office has too much security, and now we don’t know how to get the stuff out of the country. We were hoping you could think of something to help us.”

When Bernie finally stops talking, you could hear a pin drop. We both wait for Fernando’s response, eager to see if Bernie’s hunch is right or wrong.

Fernando looks at us in utter disbelief and says, “We are friends, and, in this part of the world, friends help their friends, no matter what.”

We’re both stunned, especially me. Actually

“stunned” doesn’t quite describe how I feel. “Gobsmacked” might be more like it. Followed by about a dozen exclamation points.

Fernando even has a Plan B for us. He says he’ll rent a vehicle and drive the cocaine to the Peruvian side of the border. That is 660 miles (1063 kilometers) away.

At the same time, we’re to hire a taxi to take us to a meeting spot across the border, before continuing on to Lima, Peru. Our final and mailing destination.

Bernie and I are to go to the border crossing of Bolivia and Peru. Clear customs and then wait for Fernando on the Peruvian side at the local bazaar as agreed.

This is considerably better than our Plan B, which was to dump the cocaine, take a $10,000 loss and go home with our tails between our legs, total failures as cocaine smugglers. But, then, I’m quick to remind myself that it’s only a better plan if it works.

We conclude the meeting with an agreement to meet the next morning to arrange all our transportation options out of the country.

When Fernando leaves, Bernie and I immediately pull out the cocaine and snort our way back to quasi-normalcy.

Around two in the morning, Bernie announces that he wants to find a hooker.

We go down to the lobby and rent a small car by the hour. Bernie drives, and is even more reckless and dangerous than the locals, which is saying something. He's all over the road and feels to me, as a former cab driver, like he's not too good navigating a vehicle, and this city is not the ideal place to learn.

Admirably he locates a seedy area of town where hookers line up on the sidewalk, showing off their wares. They're amazingly ugly, dirty looking and mostly old. Not qualifications that spring to mind when you're shopping for an evening bunkmate.

Bernie keeps telling me to pick one, but I tell him, "No I'm just not into it right now. You find one, and I'll wait for you."

He cruises slowly, sizing up all the whores along La Paz's red-light district. As he edges along, one prostitute after another bends down into our car window, unattractive boobs protruding, trying to make a sale.

I'm on the lookout for a passable one for him, to get this situation out of the way, but it turns out he doesn't have the same taste as me.

After driving the full length of the street and carefully scrutinizing all the prostitutes, he turns the car around for a second look. Finally, he chooses one – in my opinion, the worst looking one of all. The kind of woman who would drive a man to a life of celibacy.

She – and I use the term loosely – gets in the backseat and directs Bernie to a hotel or whorehouse or whatever it is they call them here.

All I know is that it's on the top of a hill, only accessible by a narrow winding road, and reminds me of an old grungy prison or insane asylum. It looks like a place where you may not come out alive. For some reason, I think of The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

Bernie gives me the keys to the rental car. With time to kill, I decide to drive around the city, since I've never seen it before. Naturally, within ten minutes, I'm completely lost.

I begin to sweat profusely because I don't have a clue where I am or how to get back to Bernie and the Prison of Prostitution.

I suppose I'm a little straight-laced. I've never been interested in prostitutes. Finding it odd that people can get intimate with a complete stranger that has previously done it many times that night. So I

assume that a guy would want at least an hour to take care of such intensely personal business.

Driving around with an increasing sense of desperation, I finally spot the decrepit Prison of Prostitution in the distance. Now to only find the roads that will get me there. But it's only been an hour, so I figure my timing will be just about right when I do get there.

Bernie's already standing outside waiting for me. How thoughtful. But as I get closer, I realize – he's furious.

He climbs in the car, screaming at the top of his lungs, "Where the fuck did you go?"

"I thought you'd want at least an hour with her," I reply.

He stares at me dumbfounded. "An hour? You fucking idiot! I jumped on her, and in seven minutes I came and it was all over. An hour?"

I apologize profusely. Thank God, his sexual liaison must have been a good stress reliever, because he's calm after a few minutes and ready to tackle the next part of our plan. Which begins tomorrow morning at dawn. We head back to the hotel and snort ourselves to sleep.

The morning doesn't start off well. Fernando has trouble renting a vehicle. The rental car company's policy won't allow a Bolivian vehicle to be driven across borders of any surrounding country by a foreigner. So Fernando has to give them his passport as security to ensure that he won't leave Bolivia.

Now we have to worry and wonder how he's going to cross the border and meet us in Peru. Obviously not by car. This isn't looking too good to me. We haven't even started and already there's a hitch. I think I'd rather go back to Canada as a failure than rot in a Bolivian or Peruvian jail. In fact, I'm certain I'd prefer that.

But Fernando calmly tells us not to worry and that we should continue with the plan. Namely, that Bernie and I should leave right away and wait for him on the Peruvian side of the border. At the bazaar just on the other side of the gates to Peru.

At this point, I think even Bernie's starting to question Fernando's 'so called plan.' How's Fernando going to be able to cross the border safely without a passport?

The first sentence in Drug Smuggling for Dummies is, "Have a passport." It's beginning to sound as if there's a good possibility that, after all the money, time and energy we've expended, we could lose our

entire shipment of cocaine. And maybe still end up in a prison.

But if smuggling were easy, everybody would be doing it, right? We decide to give it a shot. Bernie finds a taxi driver in town with a huge 1962 Chevrolet Impala. I later find out that most taxis are outfitted with eight shock absorbers. Two on each corner, so it can handle the treacherous, and more often than not, unpaved roads with the biggest potholes I ever saw anywhere.

Bernie asks the driver if he can take us to Lima, Peru. The taximan's face lights up in a huge smile, and he enthusiastically says, “Si senor. For $125 US dollars please.”

We’re astonished the fare is so cheap. We just look at each other trying not to let on how cheap we really think the fare is. He’s going to drive us over 650 miles, through the Andes Mountains yet, for $125?

Before he can change his mind, we quickly load our luggage in the trunk. Ready to begin our journey through some of the most demanding mountain roads in the world.

Just as we’re about to close the trunk, a man comes running out of our hotel, demanding that we return the towels we stole from our room.

Bernie says to him, “What the hell are you talking about?”

But my face turns beet-red. Realizing what’s happened, Bernie stares at me in disbelief, finally shaking his head as I rummage through my suitcase. Retrieving the towels I filched, I hand them over to the man, who glares at me accusingly, then marches back to the hotel.

Bernie says to me, “What were you thinking? We’re here to smuggle cocaine, and you’re stealing towels?”

I feebly try to explain, “Sorry, I couldn’t help myself. How often do you find yourself in a Bolivian hotel? I couldn’t resist taking a souvenir.” And I assure him that I’ll control my towel coveting and pilfering until I’m in a more acceptable setting.

The roads in Bolivia, the poorest part of the continent, are like death traps. The locals have given an official name for the road to Peru, and predictably it is Death Road. It consists of 10,000 foot sheer cliffs, with no guardrails, and potholes so deep they could flip you into oblivion if you hit one the wrong way. It’s no wonder Bolivians use double shock absorbers on their vehicles.

About a hundred miles before the Peruvian border, we gaze out to the left and see the archeological

site, Tiahuanaco. It was made famous only a few years previously in a book by Erich von Daniken called Chariots of The Gods. Which is still seen currently on History Channel’s Ancient Aliens.

In his book, von Daniken depicted this ancient civilization, whose time had long ago come and gone, leaving behind only strange megalithic monuments that yield few clues as to their true design, construction or purpose.

Tiahuanaco sits undisturbed in the Bolivian Mountains (Andes) at a height over 12,700 ft. It was one of the most significant complexes in the preColumbian Americas. Incan tradition talks about the founding Inca male and female coming to Cusco from the 'Island of the Sun' on Lake Titicaca, nearby. Being fascinated with history and archeology, I can’t pass up a chance to visit this unique site, especially after reading and being affected by Von Daniken’s book just a few years before.

We have the driver pull over, and then hurry out to examine these huge ancient stone monuments. The place is deserted, not a soul in sight, this is decades before tourists started coming, and, as a result, it’s extremely eerie.

Ducking behind one of the gigantic rock heads, we snort some cocaine, which even heightens the

mystical feel of the place.

I don’t know what Bernie’s thinking, but I can’t believe I’m actually snorting cocaine at Tiahuanaco.

And there’s nobody here, just me, Bernie and our guardian angels. Not even the sound of a car driving by. Totally surreal.

But we don’t want Fernando to get ahead of us, so we take off again toward Peru. It is still one place I never wanted to leave.

Off to the right, we can see Lake Titicaca, looking like the biblical Garden of Eden. Located on the border of Bolivia and Peru, the lake is the highest commercially navigable lake in the world. By volume of water, it’s also the largest lake in South America. It’s a wonderfully serene site, perhaps our last shot at serenity for a while, like maybe forever.

It wasn’t that much further away because before we could settle in after that incredible experience in Tiahuanaco, the road comes to a small gate signifying the tiny border customs and immigration booth.

The taxi driver clears the border crossing from Bolivia into Peru. It’s just a little wooden shack with a Customs guard in it with his feet up on the desk. He barely looks at us, smiles and cheerfully lets us

into Peru no questions asked.

Just as Fernando said, there's a bazaar just over the border. So we stop there as instructed, sitting down to have coffee and wait for Fernando to arrive, if he ever does.

That's when the taxi driver informs us that he won't actually be able to take us all the way to Lima. In fact, he says that he can't go any further into Peru, as he's not legally able to drive in this country.

Before we can go ballistic, he adds that he's found a Peruvian taxi driver and has already paid him out of the $125 original fare we'd coughed up in La Paz. The new driver will take us the rest of the way to Lima.

Amazed that we don't have to ante up any more cash, we say goodbye to our driver and thank him for getting us up here safely.

Then, with our new cabbie on standby, we settle back down at our table again. We order a fresh round of delicious Peruvian coffee for us and him. Then we wait to see if Bernie's intuition about Fernando is correct or not.

I can't help but wonder – Even if Bernie's right about Fernando, if our Argentinian cop can't cross the border without his passport, what happens then?

Will he try to throw the cocaine over the fence to us? Or will he give up and take the cocaine back to La Paz with him? It would probably finance a nice down payment on a 10,000 hectare cattle farm.

Or, if Bernie isn't right, will Fernando easily cross the border, but as a narcotics officer capturing his criminals? Which, unfortunately, would be us. Stings like this happens every day where we come from.

Halfway through our coffee, we glance up in the direction of the border crossing and spot Fernando. And he's walking with the Peruvian customs guard. The same one who just let us through twenty minutes earlier. They're heading right toward us. This appears ominous enough. But what we notice next seems worse. Much worse.

The Peruvian customs guard is clutching the airline bag with the two kilos of cocaine. And Fernando is right beside him, a huge grin on his face.

Bernie and I both stand up to face them. With the same posture and expression we'd have before a firing squad. They're less than a minute away and closing in fast. My heart is beating like a timpani drum. Aided, I'm sure, by the cocaine we snorted back at Tiahuanaco.

I state the obvious to Bernie, "This doesn't look good. Seems like a setup."

Bernie is standing tall and motionless. I wonder what's going through his mind. I sure as hell know what's going through mine – absolute, mind-numbing, gut-wrenching panic.

In a fit of desperation, I suggest, "Maybe we should make a run for it and live in the Peruvian forest until it's safe to come out." That's how wigged out I am – I actually think this is a viable option.

But it's all happening too quickly for us to react. All we can do is stand rooted to the ground, anticipating the worst, bracing for what's about to happen. Hoping we can think on our feet enough to stave off disaster.

Out of the corner of his mouth, Bernie says, "Just relax, stay calm, and don't move a muscle." Sure. No problem.

I imagine this is the way you feel on a plane that's about to crash – a sense of helpless doom. Fernando and the customs guy are only seconds away from us now.

Questions fly through my head. My short life is flashing before my eyes. How'd Fernando get into this country without a passport? What's the customs guard doing holding our cocaine? Is Fernando an undercover drug cop taking advantage of our naivety to make an international drug bust in the

Andes Mountains? Who's watching the border crossing? And most of all – how the hell can Bernie expect me to relax and stay calm?

It's all happening in excruciatingly slow motion.

Fernando and the customs guard stride right up to us with big smiles on their faces. And then the Customs guard immediately thrusts the bag right into my chest and says, "Now you know what kind of people live here in South America. You two men left your bag in the hotel, and your friend, Fernando, raced all the way up here to make sure you got it back"!

It turns out that Fernando had shown the customs guard his police ID card from Argentina and explained the situation. That these two nice Canadian tourists had accidentally driven off without their bag.

The customs man actually closed the border-crossing gate so he could escort Fernando over the border into Peru to deliver the bag of cocaine to us himself. Leaving the cars on the Bolivian side to wait for his return.

That's right – an Argentinean Police Officer and a Peruvian Customs guard actually closed down a border to deliver a bag of cocaine to two Canadian smugglers on a mountaintop in the Andes. You can't

make this kind of shit up.

Bernie and I are speechless. And I mean speechless! I'd almost be tempted to think it's some kind of cruel joke used before the bust, if I didn't see Fernando discreetly winking to assure us that this indeed is really happening.

We only have a few minutes together. Fernando has to get back down to La Paz since his mother is all alone back in the hotel. And the Peruvian customs guard has to go and reopen the crossing because the traffic is building up at the gate.

As we say our goodbyes, I'm thinking, "Oh, man, this can't get any weirder." This is another one of those thoughts that you should never have. Because, at that moment, Fernando and the customs guard both grab us and bear hug us tightly, accompanied by the customary kisses on both cheeks, sturdy handshakes, pats on our backs and wishes for a safe and prosperous journey.

The customs man then makes a point of telling us how important friends are in life, and that we should always remember the true friendships we developed while here in South America. He is proud of that. And, suddenly, so am I.

We end our group hug, and the two of them head back toward the border crossing. The customs agent

reopens the gate and goes back to work in his booth. Once Fernando is back on the Bolivian side of the border, he gets in his car and starts back down the treacherous road to the La Paz valley below. We never see him again.

We get into our Peruvian taxi, this time an old Buick from the late 50s, to continue on to Lima, where we will repackage and mail the cocaine.

I'm still stunned and bewildered. "What the fuck just happened back there?" I ask, not really expecting a coherent answer.

Bernie looks amazed as well. But there's a strange twinkle in his eyes.

He never says, "See? I was right!" or "Man, do I know how to make decisions!" Nor does he brag or take any credit whatsoever. The thing that's impressive about Bernie is that he always has an aura about him, as if nothing bad can happen, no matter what the situation is or how potentially terrifying it might be.

We sit silently in the back of the car for a long time. Like two people who had just seen a flying saucer land, aliens get out, hand us a bag with two kilos of cocaine, and then fly back off into outer space. Come to think of it, I'm not sure that's any more outlandish than what really happened.

However, we're not out of the woods yet. We're still two Canucks traveling through drug manufacturing countries that are also militant rebel infested, underdeveloped dictatorships, and, consequently, we are still prime suspects for searches anywhere and anytime.

We realize that if we have the drugs in our possession for more than a day or two, we're asking for serious trouble. And we're already on Day #2.

But getting out of that dilemma has filled us with a new sense of exhilaration, which usually overwhelms good sense.

It's getting late in the day, and Lima is still too far away to reach safely in one long night drive.

At least the Peruvian roads aren't as dangerous as the ones in Bolivia. Peru already looks more affluent too compared to Bolivia. We decide to drive to Cusco, Peru and spend the night there. It will also give us good reason to see Machu Picchu.

On the way, winding through the mountain roads, we pass through the tiniest of ramshackle villages. We stop in most of them to stretch and have a drink or something to eat. The people speak Quechua, the ancient language of the largest American Indian group in the World today. You can see the entire Milky Way, in all its wondrous glory, from one end to

the other up here.

Each time we stop and get out of the car, the locals come out, surround us, and want to talk. It's amazing how Bernie simply strolls up to a person or group of people and starts talking. If any of them have qualms or concerns, he's able to quickly dispel them, and within moments, these locals are enchanted with him, willing to share their meager portions of food and drink.

I'm continually impressed with how Bernie lives his life as if it's going to be his last day, committed to experiencing it to the fullest. And, many times, he seems almost otherworldly, like an ancient priest on his way to perform some mysterious ritual.

The rest of the way is a much easier drive than we expect, and soon we make it to Cusco, in the middle of the Andes, 11,217 feet above sea level. Cusco means "navel," and for the Incas, it was a divine place, the center of their civilization and, consequently, the center of their world. I guess you could call it "The Bellybutton of the Inca Empire."

Life for the Incas, before the arrival of the Europeans, is often pictured as peaceful and pleasant, but it was bloody and brutal, their empire was known as the "Empire of Blood and Gold." Even so, it was probably still better than the cruelty they suffered under their Spanish conquerors.

When we finally stop at a hotel in the city square to check in, the driver tells us that this is as far as he can go. He has to get back to his family, and Lima is too far for him to drive.

We can’t believe this is happening again. The next one will be Cab #3. But this driver arranges another taxi for us, and, to our surprise, pays the new cabbie out of his portion he received from the second cabbie in the Peruvian bazaar.

I’m starting to feel bad for these drivers. We’re on a 660 mile road trip through the Andes, stopping at breathtaking archeological sites, all for only 125 bucks, and without a single taxi driver asking us for extra money.

I doubt if anyone ever asked a cabbie to go from La Paz, Bolivia to Lima, Peru before. It almost seems as if they’re doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. I can’t help thinking that the gas they used and the time they wasted schlepping us through the mountains would leave all of them solidly in the red.

While we’re in this area, Bernie thinks it might be a good idea to visit Machu Picchu, the "Lost City of the Incas.” So, early the next morning, we have breakfast and a terrific Peruvian style coffee in the main square. Then our new driver takes us to the train that goes to Machu Picchu.

Our new driver will have to wait for us at least 6 hours, because, in addition to the train ride, it's a 3-hour round trip by bus up to Machu Picchu along spiral roads, each turn more hair-raising than the last. And, of course, we have to carry the cocaine with us the whole time to make sure it stays safe.

We'll have to give this cab driver extra money for this side trip. Once on the bus, we're happy to see that there are only a few people on it, and none of them are Americans or Canadians. So we don't feel too paranoid. When we arrive at the site ninety minutes later, there are only a handful of people up there from previous buses.

It is 1974 and Machu Picchu is not to become a universal travel destination for another twenty-five years at least. So we are seeing it without the hawkers selling t-shirts and popcorn to tourists, as there are none to speak of.

Today 800,000 to a million people visit Machu Picchu annually. A no-fly zone even exists over the area and UNESCO is considering putting Machu Picchu on its List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. We basically had it to ourselves to meditate with the ancient Gods.

Stepping off the bus, we're eager to explore this mystical place, which was unknown to the outside world before American historian Hiram Bingham

brought it to international attention in 1911. There are many theories about its purpose, one being that Machu Picchu was built as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti, who lived from 1438 to 1472.

I'm always amazed how a man can become a King or an Emperor. What does he know or do that scares everyone into obeying him? I figure they must be aliens from an advanced planet or dimension.

Our fellow tourists are mostly from the surrounding South American countries, but there is one girl from Israel, who's by herself. She told us she lives in a Kibbutz, which is a form of communal living, kind of like Communism.

Having that small connection, we hang out with her all afternoon as the three of us explore the mountaintop and its incredible splendor. Both Bernie and I had already been to Israel before we got into smuggling.

We don't want the Israeli girl to think badly of us two young handsome Jew boys from Canada. So we excuse ourselves, and, one at a time, go behind a two-ton brick slab and snort some more pure cocaine.

If someone were only going to try cocaine once in his or her life, this would be the place to do it. For Bernie and myself, especially after that nerve-

racking episode back at the border, snorting this high quality cocaine gives us a feeling of being on top of the world, figuratively as well as literally.

Over the years I've been to most of the wonders of the world and even the big religious sites of the Middle East. But for me Machu Picchu remains the most magical place on the planet. There is a feeling of invincibility, as well as peace, with a serenity so profound that it brings tears to your eyes. And that's not just the cocaine talking.

It's getting late and time to take the next bus back down the winding mountain road. The Israeli girl joins us. Normally, driving down a dangerous road on an old bus would be unnerving. But after the cocaine, Bernie and I feel almost indestructible, figuring that if one of these buses goes plummeting off the cliff, killing everyone on board, it won't be this one. Fortunately, we were right.

Once we're safely down at the bottom, we catch the train back to Cusco, the only way back other than by donkey, so we can meet up with our latest taxi driver.

We arrive at the train station in Cusco and, to our surprise and delight, the driver is waiting for us and ready to go. These people are amazing, we both said to each other. We hop in the car and continue on to our final destination of Lima, Peru.

Our third taxi drops us off at the bus terminal in Lima, which is a huge metropolis even in the 70s. We probably should have shot him another 100 bucks, but we're too worried about the cocaine and our ultimate mission to give much thought to the issue of gratuities.

I make second-by-second checks on where the cocaine bag is, and I'm sure Bernie's doing the same. We hail a local cab (taxi #4) to go to an area Bernie already knows called Miraflores, a gorgeous upscale area of the city.

After 660 miles of unbelievable experiences, we're finally going to be able to relax. We're finally in good shape, I think, which is, of course, yet another incredibly naïve thought to have when you're in the smuggling business.

The cabbie exits the terminal, makes a right and a left merging onto a huge five or six-lane highway. He floors the gas pedal and rockets forward – right into the rear of another car.

Stunned, Bernie and I stare at each other for a second, before Bernie yells at me, "Get out of the fucken car!" I do, and he immediately demands that the driver open the trunk.

I can see Bernie's real mad now and it catches me off-guard as I fell into a state of relaxation, even

with this accident. I figured it would just get sorted out and we'd be on our way, but Bernie was all out spooked and reacted in such an authoritarian way, it almost scared me. Thank God for him. Most likely the cops would have come and discover the dope. Looking back, he probably saved us that time too with his spooky intuition.

We grab our bags, then scurry off to the side of the highway to try and catch another ride before the cops arrive. We can still hear the yelling and screaming between the taxi driver and the owner of the car he rammed into.

Our luck was still good and another little yellow taxi picked us up (taxi #5), which finally drops us off at a cozy bed and breakfast. It's surrounded by tall flowering jasmine smelling trees that fill the air with the most amazing aroma I ever smelled. I've heard of going from the sublime to the ridiculous. This time, thankfully, we've headed in the opposite direction.

We settle into our room and, after the last three grueling days, we're ready to take it easy. But first things first – Bernie pulls out some cocaine, and, for the next few hours, we snort enough to mellow out, till we finally drift off in some kind of cocaine induced sleep.

Early the next morning, Bernie and I go to the Lima

Post Office and mail the package without a hitch. The cocaine is finally off into the wild blue yonder, heading for Canada. Of course, Bernie has held back a sizeable amount of cocaine for our personal use, since we'll spend a little time in Lima to play the tourist and see the sites.

After a few days, it's time to make our way home. We take a flight to Caracas, Venezuela, where we enjoy ourselves, which includes eating the most unbelievable chicken dinner I can ever remember. On the down side, we're forced to share a room with a cockroach as big as a Buick. Okay, I couldn't resist that quote from a Woody Allen film. It's at least as big as my hand.

Bernie is so freaked out by this mega-insect that he won't get out of bed, not even to participate in his favorite hobby – grabbing a glass and holding it against the wall to listen for adjoining room sexual activity. And for Bernie – that's really freaked out.

I can relate to him at this point. I'm afraid of even baby cockroaches, so this whopper scares the living hell out of me. And it's not the kind of cockroach you just whack with a shoe either. A sledgehammer, maybe. But not a shoe.

It mostly stays under Bernie's bed, but I never have the heart to tell him. To this day, I can still close my eyes and see that gargantuan bug, and is what first

comes to mind when I hear anything about Venezuela. With the current economic situation I'm sure they are now food for many people.

Back to business, I tell Bernie I don't think it's a good idea to go directly from Caracas to Canada. It might be wiser to be a little more circumspect.

Remember the land in Montserrat that my father won playing poker, and later built a house on? I suggest to Bernie that we make our way to Montserrat in the Leeward Islands and stay at my family home. I assure him that airport customs will welcome us with open arms. We can relax at my father's house for a while and wait for confirmation of the safe arrival of the cocaine in Toronto.

We can also mail our passports back home and return to Canada using our birth certificates. As if we only went to Montserrat for a vacation, and no record of our ever having been in South America.

Bernie loves the plan. I think this is what seals the deal for me with him. Because once we get back home, I become his right-hand man, his most trusted advisor. And from then on, I'm included in all the proprietary secrets of the trade.

There you have it – my first couple weeks on the job. I didn't have to sit through a new employee orientation program with the Human Resources

Department. I didn’t have to memorize an Employee Handbook of Rules and Regulations. I didn’t have to contribute to the Employee Birthday Kitty.

Instead, all I had to do was be honest and reliable and smart, while having the most exciting, suspenseful, mind-blowing time of my life.

And, of course, not get killed.

So far so good.

The title of this chapter is “The Trouble with Bernie.” So what is the trouble with Bernie? Well, he can be a little kinky, and exasperating when he trusts his gut over common sense, but that’s just quibbling.

As far as I’m concerned, he’s a great boss and a terrific person. So, I guess what I’m saying is that there is no trouble with Bernie.

He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Supplier

In the smuggling profession, you’re nothing without a good supplier.

In that respect, it’s not that much different from any retail operation. With a good supplier, you get a high quality product, a safe, reliable delivery system and excellent customer service. With a bad supplier, you’re stuck with inferior products, risky logistics and slipshod service.

Consequently, your inventory is adversely affected, and you ultimately lose customers. In that sense, it’s similar to any retail product, like, say, laundry

detergent. Except, of course, you wouldn’t want to snort Tide.

Over my years with Bernie, all the suppliers were his contacts. And even when I first got involved with Bruce Fink and heroin from Thailand, the supplier was his contact. But things change.

My first experience with Bruce is to pick him up in my taxi, take him to the Toronto Airport and then return to the airport two weeks later to pick him up and the smuggled heroin balls hidden inside his body.

I'm not into heroin and so have no addiction to it. As a result, by not skimming any off for personal use, I make a big profit selling it, which causes Bruce to take notice and he begins to trust me implicitly.

So, after a few months, when Bruce is ready to head off again for another batch of heroin, he asks me if I want to go with him. He says he'll teach me the ins and outs of how to do it correctly. I agree, although somewhat reluctantly, since this will mean smuggling drugs from much more dangerous locations than before.

You might ask – what can be more dangerous than being stuck with two kilos of cocaine during a military coup in Bolivia? Do you recall the sign I mentioned being at the Thailand Airport? For anyone who may have missed it – "WARNING: For anybody attempting to smuggle in or out of the Kingdom of Thailand, Heroin, Hashish etc., punishment is death for Thais and 35 years in prison for foreigners." Well, that's where we're heading – the Kingdom of Thailand.

When Bruce and I arrive for the first time together

in Thailand, we check into a Bangkok hotel he knows. Bruce informs me that he'll be back in a few days. He then takes a 12-hour bus ride to Chiang Mai, a city in the north bordering the Golden Triangle consisting of Burma, Laos and Thailand.

Being left alone in Bangkok makes me nervous. This is all new territory for me. I have no idea what I'm getting into or what's coming next. So I don't leave the hotel. I only eat what I can get from room service. And I smoke about a million cigarettes.

Finally, at some point, the hotel door opens, and Bruce enters, a little tired but appearing very happy. Obviously, he met his supplier, got the heroin and caught the bus straight back here. Easy enough, I think, jumping to a conclusion that I should have probably tiptoed around. In other words, our second trip together doesn't go quite as smoothly as the first.

Once again, we're in Thailand, or as I now like to think of it – The Enchanted Land of 35-Year Prison Sentences. Bruce leaves me once again in the hotel and makes the same 12-hour bus trip north to the edge of the Golden Triangle area.

Another geographical aside: Most heroin, at this time, is coming from what is an area of around 950,000 square kilometers (367,000 sq. mi.) that overlaps the mountains of three countries of

Southeast Asia: Myanmar (formerly Burma), Laos and Thailand. It’s a huge hub for heroin smugglers of all levels from around the world. And they all congregate in Chiang Mai, where the best heroin from Laos and Burma is bought and sold without ever having to cross dangerous military communist borders with drugs.

In my humble opinion, the Golden Triangle heroin was the best in the world, mainly because of the quality of the poppies as well as the use of ether in their labs by professional chemists. Ether fully refines the stuff to a near white pharmaceutical state that produces the nicest effect. This was the heroin that infamously addicted so many of the U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War.

But ether is extremely volatile, and many clandestine labs worldwide have exploded because of it. Killing the unqualified, and incompetent chemists. This heroin is so refined it’s almost lighter than air, every granule is like a tiny Styrofoam ball that bounces around in the air when the package is opened.

Sorry to wax nostalgic, but by the 80s the use of ether is more or less abandoned by these secret labs worldwide because of the risk, resulting in a much lower quality drug being marketed.

On this occasion, Bruce isn’t gone long. When he

opens the door, it’s obvious that things didn’t go well.

He announces right away that he didn’t get anything. He says he met his contact’s brother instead at the usual place in the city’s famous night bazaar. The brother told Bruce to “get away from Chiang Mai immediately.”

The police were cracking down hard now as a result of U.S. pressure, and his brother was taken away in the middle of the night and given 37 years in the monkey house, as the jails are referred to there. I guess that 35 on the big warning sign at the airport was meant as a minimum sentence.

Now what? Do we leave empty-handed or find another supplier? And if we look for another supplier, who the hell do you trust in this sleazy whirlwind of a country?

We go to the hooker area known as Patpong, which is like Amsterdam’s red light district on steroids. We approach prostitute after prostitute, hoping to luck into a new supplier. And of course we get ripped off numerous times.

But, finally, we meet a nice prostitute that spoke enough English to direct us to a man named Bum, which I took as kind of a big shot in the Thai underground economy.

He has a gentle face along with a calm demeanor, and we trust him right away. He takes us to a little two floor pink house where he lives with his wife and kids on the main floor. Upstairs is a tiny whorehouse in which he keeps prostitutes to rent out to tourists at the nearby Super Hotel.

Bum seems to be in his mid-30s. A go-getter selling heroin and probably opium if he had a customer for that too. With a small stable of girls for cash flow, and God knows what else he's involved in. Obviously, an ambitious, upwardly mobile young man.

He doesn't speak a word of English, but has an older friend, only referred to as 'Captain Major'. He claims to be in the Thai Military. We surmise it is his translator/partner/protector and seems very keen on developing a relationship with us to sell heroin for him and Bum. What a coincidence. That's what we want, too.

It feels weird dealing with a Thai military man, who, at any time, with a snap of a finger, can have us carted away, chopped up into a dozen or more pieces and quietly disposed of. As far as anyone is concerned, we'd simply disappear. Probably happens all the time. Plus, every time I see him, I think of the scary warning sign at the airport. But we trust Bum, and so far Bum trusts us.

During our transactions, we always pay Bum, and I suppose he gives a cut to the Major, who in turn protects Bum and, hopefully, us as well.

As our relationship develops, I become aware that Bum is growing fonder and fonder of me. Even to the point of having some kind of romantic feelings it might seem. He eventually invites me to stay at his house and often comes into my room during the day and lies down on my bed next to me.

He would knock on my door, ever so gently, poke his head in and gesture to come in. He began joining me in afternoon naps. The heat is so oppressive there you really need to lie down for a siesta. Sometimes he would hold my hand but never went any further than that. So it may have been out of genuine concern.

He may be gay. Many are in this culture, but I think it’s more that he really likes me and is worried about all the chances I’m taking in smuggling heroin.

On one trip to Thailand I traveled with a small entourage, my sister and a mule, or carrier for a reseller of mine back home. Bum and the Captain Major took us to the airport to catch the flight out, our asses locked and loaded with pure white heroin.

We’re early, so we order drinks and find a table to sit down and relax before it’s time to go. All of a

sudden, I hear a loud cracking sound, like glass breaking, just to my right where Bum is sitting.

I look at Bum and see that his hand is bleeding profusely. The Captain Major quickly wraps a cloth around the wound. It turns out that Bum was so tense and nervous about me bringing my younger sister along, and the dangers we are about to face, that he squeezes his glass so tight he actually crushes it.

Bum stares at me with such a puppy dog face that I feel I absolutely mustn't fail or he'll be devastated. This is not the usual drug dealer, he had emotions for other people. And truly cared about their welfare and getting through the airports' heavy security measures. He was as concerned as my own mother would have been.

As I mentioned earlier, being able to gain the respect and friendship of my suppliers was one of the main reasons for my success as a smuggler. My competitors, to continue the retail business analogy, only looked on their suppliers as a means to an end. They never looked on their suppliers as people. As a result, many of those smugglers are out of business – either dead or rotting in a jail somewhere. I should have remembered this.

I made so many trips to and from Bangkok I lost count after a few years. Bum remains not only a

reliable source, but a really good friend. Everything always goes smoothly, as I arrive in and depart from the Kingdom of Thailand, dire airport warning notwithstanding. And dealing with the Captain Major is always very comfortable and adds that extra touch of my signature luck.

Then one trip, Bum arranges for me to spend my last night before departure in a large house consisting of many spacious rooms. I find out later that it's actually a brothel. I didn't notice any signs indicating this since. I stay in my room, hidden from everyone, only eating food that's brought in to me.

Needless to say I always want as much peace and quiet as I can get before I depart on a drug smuggling journey. I really need to focus my mind on the upcoming flight and not have any distractions. This time, it's even more critical because the flight leaves so early. I have to get up at 5:00 in the morning to catch it.

But just because I don't see any brothel activity that evening doesn't mean I don't hear it. The noise keeps me awake most of the night.

Under heavy duress I make it out of Thailand in a sleep-deprived fog, fortunate that I'm able to keep from arousing any suspicions of the customs people I encounter.

I guess that was a good test of either ingenuity or luck. I can never seem to nail it down one way or the other.

So, on the plane I write a letter to Bum, complaining about the noise, hoping for a quieter place the next time.

Three weeks later, I receive a letter from the Captain-Major, letting me know in almost polite, but in no uncertain terms, that I've insulted Bum's hospitality and violated a trust.

I realize I can never go back to Thailand because having a Captain Major angry at you could lead to imprisonment or even death. Maybe not, but I couldn't take the chance.

Consequently, I lose a good supplier. But even worse, I lose a good friend. It's a costly lesson.

But I now need a new supplier. And the other two sides of the Golden Triangle – Laos and Burma – don't sound very safe to me.

By now, I'm taking heroin myself, having tested my product a little too often. Maybe it started out as Quality Control, but it ended up as a full blown addiction. And with no reliable supplier, I'm thrown into the world of street junkies, having to get my fix from the local dealers who cut it down so much, it's

barely 10% at best.

One day I'm at one of these street level dealer's house and see an old friend from my 6th grade in Toronto Public School. I only knew him that one school year in the fifth grade, because he moved away after that. But, when I was in my 20s, I'd begun hearing about him quite a bit on the street. Specifically, that he was a big dealer running heroin from India and Pakistan to New York, where he had a thriving business.

He's now known as Mental, but his real name is Joel Simmons. We called him Jody in school. I know – why would I have anything to do with a guy nicknamed Mental? It sounds like a euphemism for "Psychopath." But he's a nice Jewish boy from a nice Jewish family. I rest my case.

That's not to say he didn't have his oddities. What I remember from Grade 5 was that Joel organized a "Good Buddy Club" at his house after school. For any baby boomers out there, it was after a popular TV show at the time.

He wanted to be just like the character Maynard G. Krebs who played the beatnik in the 50s TV show 'The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis', the series that preceded Gilligan's Island.

So, he's kind of out there since an early age. But

that’s usually a recommendation in my book.

I sit down right next to him and discover that he’s buying heroin for his own consumption before he goes off on some mysterious exotic trip. I don’t want to press him too much as I understand the secrecy involved.

We chat for a bit, and I explain my situation and why I can’t go back to Thailand anymore.

He takes out a pen and, on the back of a book of matches, writes the name and village of an Afghan man living in Peshawar, Pakistan.

A city which is in the North West Frontier Province or NWFP as it’s known in Pakistan. A little known fact about Peshawar: it was home base to the founder of the PLO back in the 70’s. As well as the infamous Osama Bin Laden during his CIA funded days of the 80’s to fight the Russians. There’s even a US Consulate in Peshawar where the CIA agents would interact with him. But for now, it’s just a great lead for an alternate source of heroin to me. I can’t believe Mental gave me a contact of his, I have to check it out.

I tell Bruce I met Mental and have a contact in Pakistan. At first Bruce is very hesitant, and doesn’t want to trust anything coming from Mental. (I’m sure it’s the name), but Bruce, like most people in

the scene, knows or has heard of Mental.

I’m determined, telling Bruce, “Let’s give it a shot. The heroin is supposed to be made by Germans in Afghanistan. Then it’s brought over the border at night on donkeys into Pakistan where we can buy it easily.”

Eventually, after days of bugging him, not to mention the money we were spending on street quality shit, he agrees. We go to a travel agency to make reservations for Peshawar, Pakistan via New York’s JFK direct to Karachi. Then just a hop skip and a jump to mysterious Peshawar.

We don’t tell anybody about our plans. We simply check out of our hotel and disappear. If it wasn’t the coldest day of the year it sure felt like it. It had to be one of those minus 30 degree days. And we’re not wearing anything appropriate.

When we land in Karachi, we can see immediately that it’s nothing like Thailand. First, there’s no scary warning sign at the airport. And we land during the Haj which we have no clue yet what that means.

But that’s where the favorable comparison ends. The streets are filled with hordes of people, mostly men, wearing what looks to us like white pajamas. Everything is dirty and smelly. There’s no air conditioning, unless you go in the fancy hotels and

shops for the rich people. And the temperature is close to 40° Celsius (104° Fahrenheit).

I think out loud to Bruce, “This has to be the most primitive place in the world.” Wrong.

That honor goes to our next destination – Peshawar.

“Peshawar” – it almost sounds like a new drug you might see on a TV ad. (“Peshawar may not be right for everyone. Ask your doctor before taking Peshawar.”)

Of course, Peshawar isn’t really a drug, but it certainly had plenty of them. Namely, the heroin we were looking for.

Google Peshawar today, and it sounds like some exotic locale, the vibrant capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. But back in the late 70s when we’re there – not so much. In fact, judging from its appearance, if I were to give you directions to Peshawar, I’d tell you to go to the end of the world. And take a left.

When we arrive in Peshawar, Bruce and I look at each other and say, “Where the hell are we now, in the friggin’ Flintstones?” It looks like we’ve been time-machined back to the Stone Age.

Everything is clay and cement huts surrounded by

reddish brown sand with barely a tree to be seen. And those few trees that we can see look on the verge of death. Many of the taxis are horse and buggy deals, driven by old men with white beards for a few cents. The main street is a dirt road and people can be seen in the squatting position relieving themselves.

So it may be called Peshawar, but it looks like Bedrock City to me. And Bruce is Barney Rubble to me Fred Flintstone

But even if it looks like a glorified rock quarry, it does have a storied history. Going all the way back to the Silk Road, when many adventurers like Marco Polo and Alexander The Great crossed the Khyber Pass, which is just 30 miles away, and came through this city.

We take a regular car taxi to the address we got from Mental. A tiny Afghan village on the outskirts of Peshawar, the home of Nazir Qasi. When we arrive at Nazir's house, the driver begins honking his horn. Seems a little rude, but what do I know about local customs? I'd already made a terrible tactical mistake with our last supplier, Bum.

A man around 50-years-old steps out of the house. It's Nazir. I say to him, "our friend from Canada, Joel Simmons, gave us your address so we can buy some heroin. In fact, we could use some right now,

because we’re not feeling too good.”

Irritated, Nazir gazes down at us in the back seat of the car and tells us to go away. It seems Mental left out a crucial bit of info about him and Nazir. Like he still owes him $20,000.

My heart sinks, but Bruce becomes angry and tells Nazir that if he’ll just give us a little powder to make us feel better, we’ll leave.

Nazir reluctantly gives in, and even allows us into his house so we can do our hits quickly, out of sight of the neighbors, and then be on our way. We both thank him, and, on the way out, I inform him that we’re staying at the Greens Hotel in town if he’s willing to give us another chance.

Once back in town, we check into the Greens Hotel, which also looks right out of the Flintstones, with rooms on three floors surrounding a big courtyard. No fancy carpeting in the hallways, the walls, floors and ceilings are solid clay or cement. But the staff treats us like royalty, bringing us anything we want and answering all our questions.

The young man named Riaz at the front desk, as well as almost all the taxi and rickshaw drivers, ask us daily if we want any heroin. If we do, all we have to do is ask and it’ll be delivered to us. No problem and no pressure. It seems like heroin is a side business

for half the town, if not more.

In Thailand, they first ask if you want a lady, and then they might work their way up to asking if you want heroin. Here, there are no ladies of the night so there's no time wasted. They come right to the point, believing that the only reason anyone from the west comes here is to spy or buy.

They're probably right. Whenever we do come across another western looking person, it almost always appears to be a CIA agent or maybe one from Israeli Mossad or the UK's MI6 judging by their accents. And I suppose these guys look at us, and figure we're here for drugs, which they don't care about at all.

Nobody seems to care what we're doing, and we don't care what they are doing. Even so, it feels to be a very lawless place, with people continually approaching and asking if we want to buy a counterfeit Kalashnikov assault rifle, or a replica handgun. They tell us they're made up north in the Tribal Area, where there are no police or Army to interfere. Any type of weapon can be reproduced there.

They also tell us the world's most wanted fugitives from the famous airplane hijackings, bombings etc. live up there. It's truly a breeding ground for terrorists.

And remember this was all taking place from the 70’s onwards. So if a small time drug smuggler can see the beginnings of a terrorist organization forming, surely the U.N., U.S.A., U.K Interpol, etc. should also see it and nip it in the bud. But of course they never do. They are just boogeymen that the globalists can use to scare the masses into supporting a given war.

Yet another reason to think of the Flintstones. Bamm-Bamm is the adopted son of Barney and Betty Rubble. But his name makes me think of the sound made by a knockoff Kalashnikov rifle firing at me in this anything-goes part of the country.

Thankfully, we still have some of our freebie heroin from Nazir, and don’t have to try to buy any. But even if we did, it would be fairly safe. We feel as if we can probably trust most dealers here, since they look at us as a gateway to the UK, the USA or Canada.

Or they need to buy arms to defeat the Russians, who recently entered the country with a 50,000-man military force. Killing everything in their path as they moved south towards Kabul from the Russian border.

I hope I hear from Nazir. I sense something worthwhile in him and think that he’s probably a good family man who loves his kids and wants to

give them a better life in this hellhole called Peshawar.

Later that afternoon, Nazir does call the hotel room. Thank God I answered the phone. Who knows what would have happened if Bruce got it first. I get the feeling that Bruce pissed Nazir off demanding/asking for a free sample. And the honking cabbie probably didn't help either.

I'm nice as pie, which, as I've mentioned in previous chapters, have a knack for. He invites the both of us to his house for dinner that evening. His wife will cook us a meal.

As a result of my last mistake in understanding traditions in Thailand, I'm a little better prepared. I know that being asked to dinner is a traditional custom of the Afghans and that refusing a meal made by an associate's wife is potentially punishable by death.

I glance over tellingly at Bruce and ask if he'd like to come, and he says, "Sure."

Nazir tells me he'll pick us up at 6:00 p.m. and to be ready.

"We will," I assure him.

I start to get ready, beginning with a shower. Our

appointment is only a few hours away, and I'm determined not to miss it for anything in the world. It'll be a rare opportunity – enjoying a meal at an Afghan home that's being personally prepared by the wife, while we men sit around and talk business.

When I get out of the shower, Bruce is passed out on his bed, most likely from a monster heroin hit. He's notorious for this and one thing that I can't stand about the guy. I remind him to get ready, but he just shrugs and says he will soon. I finish getting dressed and lie down on the bed to wait for Nazir to arrive.

Nazir's right on time, another excellent quality to go along with him being a caring family man.

Bruce had gotten up, showered and shaved, but he also did another big hit of junk. And he is now lying on the bed again, nodding like a pig.

I announce, at a higher decibel "Bruce, Nazir is here. Let's go." But Bruce just looks at us and says he's very tired and wants to stay in the hotel.

I can't believe it. I think, "Oh, God, this schmuck's going to ruin it for us."

But Nazir says to me, "That's okay. You come."

Once again, I get that feeling he doesn't particularly like Bruce, and I can only hope he won't find any

reason to dislike me.

We get in his car, and he drives us to his humble abode, a concrete little house, cold and musty-smelling, with a few traditional Afghan carpets on the floor. Now I know why carpets seem to be the biggest selling items next to food. Without them the living quarters would be so barren.

As a new guest, I'm not allowed to see any female members of the family, so Nazir and I sit off to ourselves in another room, getting to know each other. After a while, when the food is ready, he goes to the kitchen and brings it out for us to enjoy. The women eat in the kitchen, I don't know how many but it sounds like at least three.

Years later, I finally meet his whole family and actually see their faces. This is a real display of trust, since a woman's face is a very private thing in the Islamic world.

Still, years later, Nazir becomes a rich man from our dealings and owns a large eight bedroom house in Karachi. I stay there instead of at a hotel and get to be part of his whole family. My favourite part was waiting for the man selling buffalo milk every morning. So thick and creamy and delicious.

And, of course, as you'll remember, Nazir eventually lets me know that he has despised Bruce ever since

he refused his first invitation to join him for a dinner cooked by his wife. The only thing that kept him from having Bruce killed and disposed of in the mountains was his affection for me.

Both Bum and Nazir were two of my main suppliers, “my” being the key word. That’s because no matter where you are in the system, you’ve got a supplier.

It’s like any product. Consider chicken fingers. There are the egg layers, the growers, the harvesters, the processors, the wholesalers, the distributors, the retail operators and the customer. And maybe a few other steps in between.

Drugs are no different. Starting with the grower, there’s a chain of suppliers, each providing a product or service as the marijuana or the cocaine or the heroin or whatever works its way to the end user. It’s capitalism in action.

In any business, you’re only as good as your suppliers.

I was lucky. I had suppliers who were not only exceptional businessmen, but also exceptional friends

The Colour of Other People’s Money

For me, smuggling wasn’t about the money.

It was never about the money.

Okay, sometimes it was about the money.

But that came later.

Starting out in the smuggling business as a 23-year-old with no experience and little money, it was obvious I’d be using someone else’s cash for my first transaction – Bernie’s. Specifically, 10,000 in US dollars. All in 100 Benjamins.

In other words, the money was green, and so was I.

On Bernie’s and my first trip together, the one to Bolivia, we were in our hotel room preparing to meet our contact to buy two kilos of cocaine. That was when Bernie handed me the $10,000 to take care of.

If I needed a wakeup call that smuggling was a high dollar, nerve-wracking occupation, being handed ten grand for safekeeping was it, loud and clear. Suddenly, this wasn't a pleasure jaunt to South America. It was a potentially dangerous, potentially lucrative enterprise. But, as the saying goes, "the greater the risk, the greater the return."

I also realized – while we're in cliché land – "you have to spend money to make money." And this $10,000 of Bernie's money I was guarding, and he was spending, had the potential to make ten times that amount back in Toronto, my hometown. So, just to make myself more anxious, I reminded myself that I was toting a possible $100,000.

Smuggling is a cash business. No credit cards or personal checks. Also, no purchase orders, invoices or receipts. In other words, no paper trails. Only cash. So, over the years, a lot of money – this cold, hard cash – went through my hands. I was either buying or selling. Most of the buying money belonged to others. Some of the selling money was mine. A sales commission, if you like.

But when I was just starting out, the money was a fringe benefit, a perk. I was more interested in the excitement,

After that first trip to Bolivia with Bernie, when we finally shipped out the two kilos of cocaine with the

help of the Argentinian police officer and the Peruvian customs guard, it was back to Toronto for me. We had the supply. It was time for me to check out the demand. Unfortunately, since I'd never done cocaine, never sold cocaine, and had no idea who to sell it to, this seemed like a daunting task.

Bernie and I took separate flights back to Canada, Bernie to Montreal where he has a woman waiting, probably a prostitute.

I go directly to Toronto where I will meet Arturo, the person who received the package we sent from Lima, Peru. Once it's in my possession, I'll call Bernie to tell him the coast is clear and he can return to Toronto.

Arturo is an artist from the beatnik era, older than me, born in the 40's a completely different generation than the 50's children. Since I'm definitely from the hippie generation, we don't have much in common. Other than two kilos of cocaine, of course.

He looks a little like David Crosby of Crosby Stills & Nash, with long, wavy, below-the-shoulders, dirty blond hair. He has a moustache and wears a wide brimmed hat. He's about my height, 5'10", or maybe an inch shorter. Not exactly Judy Blue Eyes.

He comes across as arrogant, someone with a

sizeable ego. And he seems skeptical of me, as a matter of fact, very skeptical. But he has his orders from Bernie and hands over the bag of cocaine, no doubt wondering who the hell I am, and why he doesn't have my job.

I give him some personal cocaine, as instructed, and then we go on our merry ways. I don't know it then, but I'll see Arturo in the near future, and he'll be a key to our operation once again.

I take the cocaine to the safest hiding place I can think of – my mother's house. I hide it up in the rafters of the basement that I know oh so well. And when I refer to the house as my mother's, it also means my father's too. Especially since he came up with the $500 for the down payment in 1952.

On a side note; my father told a story once where he debated heavily whether to put the 500 bucks in the stock market and buy Kodak or the bungalow they were looking at. So instead of reaping a potential windfall of millions and buying a big fancy house in a nicer neighbourhood, he bought our cozy little bungalow. Which gave us all an upbringing that always brings forth wonderful family memories. The house was always filled with laughter, mostly from my mother's side.

My mother is aware of everything I'm doing, and obviously doesn't like it one bit. But she's not a

mother to interfere and cause me even more grief. That can cause dangerous mental confusion leading to a possible deadly mistake. So she always chooses to support me in anything I do, including the smuggling of drugs.

My mother also loves Bernie. I get the feeling she is going along with my behavior partly because she thinks, in her own words, “Bernie’s such a refined boy.” She used to say he could have easily been a cult figure. He had that kind of charisma.

Once the cocaine is safe and secure in the rafters of my mother’s house, I go to my apartment and start thinking – how the hell am I going to sell this stuff? After all, that’s what I was hired to do. It’s officially time to move past the adrenaline-infused adventure of smuggling the cocaine into the country and on to the practicalities of actually unloading it for money. This is the point where I have to try to turn Bernie’s original $10,000 investment into $100,000.

Cocaine is not yet a mainstream drug at this time. Even though the hippie days are coming to an end, the drug of choice for the younger generation is still marijuana. It makes them feel peaceful and groovy. Nobody I know wants to do cocaine and become a wired-up paranoid freak. So, where do I sell it?

I go over everyone I know who could possibly help me sell this stuff. But all of them are weed people,

not cocaine, and want nothing to do with me if I am in that line of work.

Finally, I realize there's only one person I know who has a cocaine clientele – my ex-wife's lunatic sister Laney, arguably the craziest human alive.

I realize I'll have to suck up to her big-time, since she's still furious with me for taking over her cocaine distribution position with Bernie. But, deep down inside, I think she'll understand. She's always looking for cocaine to sell so she can keep up her own habit.

Win/win – Laney gets cocaine like before, although at a little higher price, and I get the stuff sold and earn brownie points with Bernie. Also I'll begin developing a dealer network. Bernie will certainly be happy about that, because he plans to go back to Bolivia repeatedly. And he's always one step ahead planning the next excursion.

But, as I suspect, dealing with Laney is a challenge. She sees things that aren't there. She says things that aren't relevant to the situation (i.e. whacky). Worst of all, she gives me the dreaded feeling that she's under constant surveillance, soon to be detained by a drug squad.

Dealing with her is very dangerous as she's completely unpredictable and chaotic. Many future

boyfriends would end up in jail as a result of her stupidity. And she is always stoned out of her mind. This isn't good under any circumstances, but especially dealing drugs. She does sell some cocaine for me quite quickly.

Soon, Bernie lets me know that he's coming to Toronto to pick up some money and wants to meet downtown on Bay Street, which is the Wall Street of Canada.

I'm to meet him at a lawyer's office on the third floor of a posh office tower. Right across the street from the Toronto Stock Exchange. When I finally find it and walk into the huge foyer, I notice that the secretary is not at the front desk. Presumably she or he is gone for the day, it is past 5 p.m. after all.

I hear voices toward the rear, so I head in that direction.

It's a big law firm with loads of offices. As I make my way down the corridor I see, out of the corner of my eye, someone in an office to the left. It's a tall gorgeous black woman. She's sitting in a chair in the middle of the room. Completely naked with her long luscious legs spread apart for good measure.

Strange. But it's the office of a bunch of attorneys. Maybe they've filed her briefs.

I don’t linger. I know Bernie must be here somewhere, so I forge on towards the men’s voices.

Along the way, I spot two naked white women in other offices, in similar positions. I think I’m picking up a pattern here.

Finally, I come upon Bernie. He’s with two older grey haired men. In their fifties I assume. One is a hotshot lawyer, named Harvey Daiter, a Queen’s Counsel or QC for short. Which is quite a prestigious title in Canada I’m told.

Harvey Daiter sits behind a big walnut desk with pictures of his attractive wife and two beautiful kids, prominently displayed for all to see. Just like my Jewish daddy does in his office, minus the long legged whores of course.

Standing behind him, glaring at me with poison darts aiming in my direction, is the uncle of Brenda and Laney. Which would make him my ex-uncle-in-law. It’s Uncle Fishy!

As bizarre as that name sounds, it’s actually an understatement. If he’d only been fishy, it would have been an improvement. Uncle Psycho would have been more like it.

Brenda’s father had a big family. The women were angels and the men were devils. Except for my ex-

father-in-law, Fishy's older brother Harvey. He was the best of the bunch because he managed to turn his life in a complete 360 and become a pillar of society.

Uncle Fishy was the worst, and everyone in the family knew to stay away from him because he was mentally unstable and frequently violent. It turns out that Uncle Fishy has been recently released from a federal penitentiary. No surprise there.

How Bernie happened upon a high priced lawyer like Daiter, I have no idea. I find out later that Daiter is one of the top criminal lawyers in the city. That might explain the connection with Uncle Fishy, since I consider him one of the top criminals in the city.

Daiter is chopping lines from a two thousand dollar ounce bag of cocaine, forming neat piles of white powder on his expensive walnut desk. He quickly carves out lines for everyone to snort. I discover that the three naked women I'd seen earlier are high-class hookers. I think I may have suspected that.

A top criminal attorney involved with cocaine and prostitutes? – The ironies are beginning to pile on.

These men in their mid-fifties are separating gigantic lines of cocaine, crudely with the end of a hundred dollar bill. And I wonder if these upper crust know-it-alls have any idea what they're getting

into.

It’s one thing to get involved with the hard powder drugs like cocaine or heroin when you’re young. Your body is strong and can withstand those kinds of abuses, mentally and physically. Most importantly, being a part of that underground drug scene full time, not as extra-curricular activity from an accountant or lawyer job, for instance. Bernie and I fit this profile.

However, if you start on the hard stuff in your 50s, when your body is weaker and less resilient, especially if you have a desk job for a living, you’re not asking for trouble, you're asking for disaster.

I’m actually feeling a little concerned for them, because I know the impact this white powder can have on a person’s psyche. An older mind could have serious problems coping.

But who am I, a 23-year-old kid, to say anything to the likes of them? So we talk and snort till someone calls in the waiting whores.

Everyone begins having a good time. Except me. I thought I’d enjoy a situation like this, but find out I’m not like the other guys there. They don’t seem to mind these demeaning, completely impersonal liaisons. But I do have to admit, if you close your eyes, it can feel quite pleasurable.

Finally, once they finish, and the hookers are dressed and gone, I take out two ounces of our pure Bolivian cocaine and give it to Daiter, the high rolling and respectable Jewish lawyer.

In return, the crazed gangster Uncle Fishy pays me 4,000 bucks, a hell of a lot of money in 1973 to just throw down on white powder, only to ingest it up their nostrils.

By dawn, I'm long gone. And so is the cocaine. They ring me up for more.

When I deliver it to them, Daiter takes the fresh bag of cocaine and puts it in the firm's vault. Right there with the wills, the stocks, the bonds and all the other valuables entrusted to him, while they go downstairs for dinner.

This is my first glimpse of the real world – the power of money and the power of cocaine. I'm amazed how these people lose control so easily. It seems as if the ones with the most stable and secure lifestyles, these wealthy family men, spin out the fastest once they take a wrong turn in the road (in Daiter's case, literally).

I never see Harvey Daiter again. Six months later, I read the headlines in all the daily newspapers about Harvey Daiter QC.

He’s driving home from a party, loaded with a deadly mixture of booze and unreported cocaine. He rolls his expensive German sport model on the highway (that “wrong turn in the road”). He dies at the age of 52, leaving behind a loving wife, two beautiful kids, a booming law practice with a fantastic career and a huge home. And probably a safe full of cocaine with my fingerprints all over them.

And that was my introduction to the economics of drug smuggling.

More lessons would follow.

After the Daiter/Uncle Fishy show, I continue to try and sell off the rest of the cocaine.

Bernie’s organizing the next trip to Bolivia with Beatnik Arturo and his girlfriend, who are supposed to go with him.

That’s fine with me. I can stay in Toronto, keep selling the cocaine, and not have to go into the Danger Zone, as I refer to it.

But I find out that they’re planning a bigger shipment for this next trip. Which means Bernie, Arturo and his girlfriend are depending on the money I bring in to finance it. So now, the pressure is really on me.

They’re going over the logistics of the upcoming Bolivian trip at Arturo’s remote farmhouse. I have to find more dealers to sell the stuff to so the money flows in faster, as I’m sure Bernie is hoping and expecting.

I manage to root out one of Laney’s contacts, and I begin dealing with him. It’s the one-armed guy named Jeff Aaron, whose street dealer brother later caused me problems by mentioning my name to the police.

Fortunately, Jeff’s able to sell the stuff easily. Everything’s going great. The money’s coming in steadily. In other words – beware.

I keep the money I collect on a shelf in my old room at the house, “the Bank of Mom”, you could call it. She wants to know where it is, “just in case.” What a smart mummy she was.

“Just in case what?” I challenge.

But, nevertheless, I show her the cash hidden in a book on the second shelf in my old room. She’s my mother after all.

If you remember the equation that $10,000 of coca in Bolivia equals $100,000 worth of sales in Canada, it ought to be obvious that we’re going through a lot of money. Bernie gets the lion’s share, which he

keeps stuffed in his mother's safety deposit box at her bank. That's okay – I've got more than I can ask for.

But even though I now have plenty of money, I never splurge. No expensive car, no flashy jewelry, no designer clothes. I keep it simple. For two reasons. First, the money's still not that important to me. And, second, it's the high rolling dealers, wearing their egos in their BMWs who inevitably get caught. One right after another.

Any undercover cop can take one look at some of these guys and know, beyond a doubt, that they didn't get that money delivering pizza or driving a cab. A license plate check while driving down the street can tell an officer a lot of information to go another step further if he so chooses. Why take those chances.

It comes down to my Rule #4: Caution, caution, and then a little more caution. So, I never showboat, and I only trust Bernie and my mother.

Bernie and I aren't like the usual drug dealers. I drive an old beat-up jalopy. Bernie doesn't even drive a car. And when he shops, he's really stingy, yet in almost a quaint, old-fashioned way.

But we're a little different with how we spend our money when it comes to where we live. I've got a

tiny apartment, which I rent under an assumed name. Bernie, on the other hand, lives in an exclusive apartment in downtown Toronto that has a 15-year waiting list.

That is before his mother somehow arranged for him to bypass it. And because his mother was in the antique business, he was able to surround himself with rare paintings and a genuine Tiffany lamp for example. He even had an old antique chess board that we would sit at and play chess for hours on end. His family sure seemed to have some strange old world connections. It was a bit spooky and mysterious.

Other than his fancy apartment, Bernie didn't seem too driven by the money. It was more the cocaine that motivated him. He loved the stuff. Sometimes I thought he was just doing all this smuggling so he could have a bottomless bag of cocaine to snort from.

In that regard, the money seemed almost secondary. In fact, if he enjoyed eating shrimp as much as he liked snorting cocaine, I'm sure he would have been in the shrimp catching business. He was sort of like the Forrest Gump of the cocaine trade.

So, when did the money become important?

Hard to say. Maybe it's when Bernie and I realize

that we have enough to take a breather. With all the stress of the past couple of years and numerous trips to Bolivia, we decide we've got sufficient cash stockpiled to take a little time off. An extended vacation. A sabbatical if you will.

But where? Toronto? No way. There have been too many close calls in Toronto.

It would have to be a place where we feel comfortable and that doesn't cost an arm and a leg to live. One spot comes immediately to mind – Colombia.

Specifically, Cali, Colombia, known as the Breadbasket of South America for its black lush soil and beautiful mountain top finkas. They also have a disproportionate amount of beauty pageant winners.

And we'd been there before:

We're on our way to a party in the mountains of Colombia, north of Cali, at the home of Pablo Escobar's cousin.

If the name Pablo Escobar sounds familiar, it should. He's the notorious, elusive, ruthless Colombian drug lord eventually gunned down in broad daylight in a hail of bullets while attempting to flee from his Medellin home base. He probably was the first cocaine billionaire

Bernie is driving a huge Land Rover on an extremely narrow mountain road, similar to the god-awful ones in Bolivia. There is at least a half dozen of us in the vehicle. The road is winding, there are no guardrails to be seen, the drop below is nowhere near a joking matter and Bernie is driving like a mashugana (Yiddish for maniac).

He's continually waving his arms, laughing and talking, half the time not even watching the road. And what about the damn steering wheel Bernie for Christ sake!

I'm in the back area with three others. One is a hardened criminal type who looks like he's about to crap his pants, which is not much of a comfort for me. If a tough, macho guy can't handle this jolting, jarring car trip, what's a poor Jew boy smuggler like me supposed to think?

Actually, Bernie driving like a lunatic is understandable. Not only is he high on enough cocaine to kill a small group of people, he's drunk as hell too. No limitations of strength on the hard liquor in South America I would imagine.

At one point, and, thank God, it's only once, he veers so close to the edge on a tight turn that, for a split second, I could swear we have only three wheels on the road. Three out of four – usually good odds unless you're driving on a switchback.

Pablo Escobar's cousin's party is at his home on a huge 20,000-acre farm at the very top of this treacherous mountain that Bernie is trying to plunge off.

It turns out to be a wild decadent Colombian elitist party, with unlimited supplies of booze, and, obviously, cocaine. For all we know, Pablo Escobar may even be here. Since it's during the years of consolidation of the Cali and Medellin cartels. If he was there nobody thought to introduce him to me.

It might have went like this. "Mr. Escobar I'd like you to meet Hank, he's from Canada." Escobar thinking, who the fuck is this guy, and paranoid as hell from snorting copious amounts of pure cocaine, says "He could be a fucken spy, take him out back and kill him immediately." Maybe it was good luck I didn't talk to anybody other than a pretty girl that night.

God only knows how we get back down the mountain after this party. Or how many brushes with death we have left.

There are no such thing as designated drivers. Just as well. Everyone is stinking drunk and stoned on cocaine. If we had to wait for a designated driver, we might still be up there today.

Bernie and I decide Cali is the perfect spot for our

sabbatical. The cost of living is low. (For example, $5.00 for a steak dinner with veggies and a baked potato, not to mention unbelievably delicious.) The nightlife can only be described as amazing if you're young and unwed.

We can hire a maid to clean our jeans and shirts, and make wonderful Colombian coffee for us every morning in a sock. (That's right – a sock. Go figure.) Plus, we'll be surrounded by the most beautiful girls you've ever seen, all of whom will no doubt go crazy for handsome young Canadian boys like Bernie and I.

And if that isn't enough, here's the kicker – Cali is also the Cocaine Capital of Colombia. That's about all Bernie needs to sway his decision.

So, it's settled. Our new base of operations will soon be in Cali, Colombia.

It's been over six months since we did any business in our own backyard of Toronto. Plus another few months have passed looking for somewhere to live in Cali. This should have been enough time for the police to have lost my trail and inevitably give up, for the time being anyway. At least, that's what I'm hoping.

And now that I'm not so desperate for customers, I can pick and choose more carefully to minimize any

surprises. If you'll recall, I don't like surprises (unless I'm the one doing the surprising).

Bernie and I secretly make our final arrangements for moving to Cali, only telling our mothers where we're going. And, even then, we don't mention the city, just the country, we'll notify later.

It doesn't take much when you're young and transient to get your shit together and move to another country. Consequently, in only a few days, we're at the travel agency buying an open return ticket. Now we can come back when we want and still have all the time we need to explore the new environment.

We stop in Bogota but we don't stay long. It's a very fast pace busy city and there are so many drug middlemen who can potentially make life miserable, or most likely end it.

Soon we land in Cali and we both get the same feelings. That this is a strange and mysterious city with secrets we could never even guess at. For us, that's an endorsement. We're both really pumped about this new life.

But we also realize we have to be careful. Even though Colombia isn't like the wild, gun-slinging outpost of Bolivia, it still has rebels hiding in the hills. These rebels can make a habit of kidnapping

foreigners, sometimes with a few murders thrown in for added drama.

Bernie and I quickly settle in. As usual, Bernie has his own MO, which mostly amounts to chasing girls.

And also as usual, I keep to myself, trying not to think of the possibility of any danger, just living in the moment. I can't avoid worrying. It's in both my DNA and my job description. But even though I can tend to be standoffish, it doesn't take me long to get into the scene.

This is the early 70s after all, and Cali is like the Amsterdam of South America. Except not a haven for hippies hanging around smoking pot.

Instead it's for cocaine smugglers. There are people from all over the world here, smuggling cocaine back to their respective countries. A lot of them, surprising to me, are fellow Jews.

In fact, we find there's been a large Jewish community in Cali for centuries. And over that period these Jews have become firmly entrenched in the lucrative areas of the economy. Of course, 'entrenched in the lucrative areas of the economy' means 'smuggling cocaine.'

For example, we meet the smuggling Jewish son of a Fribourg, Switzerland chief-of-police. A young

Jewish waiter in a high class restaurant in Brussels. He told us stomach wrenching retribution stories by chefs on complaining customers. Stories too horrible to have the readers of this book be subjected to.

We also meet three Jewish brothers from Calcutta, India, who smuggle cocaine worldwide. I'm fascinated, all I know is growing up in Canada as a Jew. When I ask one of them what it was like growing up as a Jew in Calcutta, he replies, "It was like basic training for life." It didn't sound like a recommendation.

After we've been in Cali for a while, I was fortunate to be introduced to the parents of the three brothers, who have come all the way from India to visit.

Imagine, not one but three Jewish mama boy sons from India who get involved in the cocaine trade and the parents are supportive enough to visit. They're in their 80s and look just like the Jews in Canada, except, of course, for their Indian-curry colour skin and their Hindi accent. They were just as cute as my grandfather back home in Canada.

On a side note: My grandfather miraculously made it to Canada after walking with his wife, who was pregnant with my father, and two kids to Poland from Russia. My father was born on the road before they got to where they were going, making it then

three kids. My grandfather left them all behind in Poland to go find a better life.

He was denied entry to his dream destination, Palestine. Instead the British allowed him to go to the UK to fight in their Army. Then he managed somehow to get on a boat to Canada in 1929, the year of the crash. And, coincidentally, the same year my mother and her family arrived at the Halifax port.

Then he had to make enough money to send for the family, which he did. Laying the groundwork for my father to one day meet my mother in Toronto twenty years later so I could be born and eventually write this book.

And after explaining that, thank you and back to the book:

The Indian Jews continue to tell us that their ancestors have been in India for over a thousand years and have connections all over the world.

And here they are in the Cocaine Capital of Colombia, these nice, sophisticated and elderly Jewish Indian parents. In fact, most of the people in the cocaine trade with whom we are dealing with come from nice Jewish families, whatever the country of origin. Just like the families Bernie and I came from in Canada. It was a home away from

home.

I thought those Indian Jews were lucky in a way, their ancestors living in the same country for over a thousand years, when I have trouble tracing my ancestors before the 1880's. All I know is that both sides of my family were driven out of the Caucuses, so who knows how many other moves they had to make over the centuries.

Jews have been kicked out, for one reason or another, from so many countries in the past thousand or more years, it's not funny. It's truly refreshing to learn firsthand of Jews living in relative peace and harmony for such long periods of time. That says a lot for the Indian culture and compassion, which is one of the oldest and hence more mature than most.

But even though families seem similar, Canada doesn't look anything like Colombia. It doesn't have lush green mountains filled with the three Cs, coffee, cannabis and coca. Or the same abundance of beautiful sexy women either.

Bernie and I both realize that Cali is a special city. And thanks to the drug money we accumulated, we plan to enjoy ourselves and live like kings.

During our stay in Cali, I can't say if I ever came face-to-face with Pablo Escobar. I can say, that over

the years, I was invited to some amazing parties held on machine gun guarded mountaintop compounds.

These parties were attended by some of the fanciest looking and wealthy people you can imagine. I never saw such wealth in Canada like that, super expensive vehicles, Rolex watches were commonplace. “Money is no object” was the feeling I got.

The name Pablo Escobar wasn’t a big name in the news back then. He was just beginning to build his organization or cartel as they became to be known, when Bernie and I were living there.

No matter what you may think of him, what Escobar did was actually quite amazing. To organize a gang like he did in a ruthless rebel infested country like Colombia was quite an accomplishment.

Bernie and I sometimes suspected that Escobar may have arranged for us to receive invites to these high roller parties so he could check us out. He’d get to see us in a leisurely setting, with free access to good cocaine, food, drink and women. See how we conduct ourselves and would have a better idea what kind of people/dealers we were.

If we crossed a line or seemed a threat, he could have had us killed in the blink of an eye. Especially

since he had a firm grip on the Medellin Cartel, which we would, blindly or unknowingly associate with from time to time.

Odd note: My best friend Paul Esco used to kid me that if Pablo Escobar was to fake his death and live anonymously here in Canada, he would change his name to Paul Esco. I always wonder about that as the Paul Esco is a very organized kind of a guy.

Before Cali, Bernie and I just bungled along, oblivious to everything. But finally we have enough money to afford a nice safe life in Cali. And we don't have to get involved with large gangs of drug dealers. Without all the attendant craziness that goes along with it, as we'd witnessed firsthand in the Florida Keys with Officer Barbrady and the marijuana smugglers.

So, the money had become significant. It brought comfort and security to our lives.

We were always small time. Bernie figured it was safer to do business that way. And, more importantly, we'd probably stay alive longer. So, even though we were in the Colombian backyard of Pablo Escobar, we never sought out any high ranking cocaine dealers.

The thing that always amazed me about drug dealing was that, no matter how much money people

have, they're willing to spend thousands of dollars on white powder that disappears up their nostrils or in their veins. And never give it a second thought.

The title of this chapter is "The Colour of Other People's Money," referring to the huge amounts of American greenbacks (as well as the Technicolour cash of Canada) exchanged in the smuggling business, most of which belongs to others, not to me. I got my healthy share, of course, but mostly it was Bernie and Bruce who fronted the money for the buys.

But the "colour of other people's money" had another meaning for me – one much closer to home.

As before, the colour was green, but this time it was from envy.

Growing up, I thought we were just one big happy family – my father Fred, my mother Goldie, my older brother (by 5 years) David and my younger sister (by 2 years) Leney.

That all changed after my mother Goldie died in 1996. The realization suddenly hit that our parents were mortal, and there would be money to be inherited. Because David was an accountant and the oldest child, he was executor.

My mother had always stashed my drug cash,

always in nice neat piles of twenty dollar bills. My Dunhill lighters (as used by James Bond), my solid gold watches and all the other valuable goodies I picked up along the way.

Each time returning from Pakistan it would go via Abu Dhabi, Bahrain or Dubai. They had Duty Free Shops that would make you salivate. I would accumulate such beautiful classic pieces.

I never saw what was in my mother's safety box. But after she died, my brother unexpectedly had a $25,000 renovation done to his kitchen. He went on cruises with his entire family. He sent his kids to study in Europe and Israel. Think it's a Coincidence? Didn't seem or feel like it to me. I think he might have been envious – if not of my lifestyle, then certainly of my money.

My father, Fred, died six years later. Speculation was I had been my mother's favorite. Surprise to me, my father actually confirmed it at his office the day after she died during a rare father and son talk.

My father idolized my older brother his entire life, well almost. He always thought I was the crazy one. (Maybe that wasn't completely off the mark – I did some crazy things by most people's standards.)

Even though David was his favorite, he loved us all, as a good father does. But in the last year of his life,

things changed. He began to see the true colours of his three kids. This is where the green of envy comes in.

At 82 years of age my poor father realized that David, as sole executor, was taking care of himself financially. And doing whatever it takes to make sure leaving me with absolutely nothing to be the ultimate goal.

Even though my father was aware of what was going on, he didn't have the strength to do anything about it. He never had Alzheimer's or any kind of dementia. Up until the last day his brain was at full capacity. He was simply too weak to challenge what he knew was going on.

About three months before he died, he became bedridden. Before that he could still, albeit very slowly, get out of bed, hold onto the walls and get around the house.

But he watched in horror as he figured out what was happening to me. And at the hands of his unworthy executor son David yet. Toward the end Diane and I stayed with him night and day, making sure he got his food, cigarettes and booze, the only pleasures left for him.

While his oldest son couldn't take the time to spend two minutes with his dying father. The man that

bought him a brand new eight cylinder Dodge Coronet convertible with bucket seats at 16 years of age. There was no more money to pilfer from him anymore, since he was on his way out, must've been how he looked at it.

Before he died, and I'm talking only a few weeks to go, he had come to a very sad realization. He said he'd come to appreciate who I was, in spite of my dropping out of high school, in spite of my having no upwardly mobile career, and in spite of my drug smuggling.

I'd become his favorite.

It was an intensely emotional and gratifying moment of vindication. To see my father find out the truth about me and the fake truth about his most trusted son David, which was also a sad thing to witness. I could see the devastation and even tears on my dad's face over that realization. Poor guy, he's about to die any day and has to find out the sickening truth his oldest son didn't give two shits about him. What a way to die!

And I almost feel sorry for ruining David's carefully planned out assault on both his parents' finances. Definitely too bad about my mother being buried thinking that all the 20 dollar bills in her safety box would be promptly handed over to her favorite son upon her death.

Instead David's eyes must've popped out of his head. And while putting them back in place, was thinking of what kind of wood to choose for his kitchen. Which is about to be remodeled thanks to his drug dealing stupid brother.

After my father's death, I thought there might be a chance that some inheritance might come my way. But my brother wouldn't finalize our father's will and disperse the money.

He was caught up in too much debt and too many lies by now. So, after waiting and waiting, my sister Leney and I finally consulted a forensic accountant about the possibility of suing David over the delay.

I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, I felt I'd been cheated. On the other, I was thoroughly embarrassed over how a once tight and trusting family such as ours was now in such an ugly position.

I asked the lawyer if this kind of thing happened often. He pointed toward a mountain of paperwork, files and folders stacked up to the ceiling at the end of his boardroom table. "Look at that," he said. "It's all the same issue– families fighting over inheritance. It's an epidemic!" he said. And evidently contagious.

I decided not to sue David. I felt slightly better

knowing that it wasn't just our family that was all screwed up over money. Not once did I think a family breaks down so blatantly after the book covers fall off. That makes me either completely stupid or too trusting of people. How in the hell could I have lasted in the underworld for decades with killers is beyond me.

On the subject of money, here's a quick lesson in capitalism:

Back in the late 1970s …

$10 of smuggled cocaine would sell for $100

$10 of smuggled heroin would sell for $1000

Why the huge difference? For one reason – to trot out the previous bromide again – the greater the risk, the greater the return. If you'll remember, one of the risks with heroin was the automatic 35 years of imprisonment in Thailand. A hell of a risk, by anybody's standard.

But what a return! And, as frequently happens, economics can eventually dominate good sense.

But even with the opportunity to make a hell of a lot more money, I still believe it was the chance of new adventures and new experiences that was the determining factor for me. Perhaps it was also

related to a sense of freedom, sort of like that associated with the drug-infused hippie era I grew up in.

It was a very interesting time in the world of drug smuggling. Customs agents didn't realize that the long haired hippies travelling abroad were actually smuggling drugs.

A window of opportunity was wide open for any young person wanting to continue the excitement of the declining hippie days. Quite a few took advantage of it, amassing a small fortune and then quitting before the authorities figured out what was going on. In other words, before it got too risky.

I suppose it always comes down to measuring risk versus return.

Maybe that's where I was a little different. I liked them both. To me, they were mutually attractive, with the nod usually going to risk. And since heroin had both more risk (i.e. potential excitement) and more money, it was just a matter of time before I moved to heroin.

So after eight years of smuggling cocaine with Bernie, I began smuggling heroin with Bruce and continued for 10 more years. Part of the time I was on my own. And for that last decade, there was definitely a lot more cash involved.

Although I had money stuffed in safety boxes, I didn't feel all that motivated by it. I still ended up living in the more rundown, nondescript parts of town, surrounded by real everyday working people. Rather than the ticky-tacky of the suburbs or on a palatial estate.

They say that money is the way you keep score. If that's true, I guess I wasn't playing the same game as most everybody else.

Over those fifteen years of smuggling, I handled tons of money. I've seen it come, and I've seen it go. I had seen its power and what it can do to people. From bringing down an arrogant, big-time corporate attorney to tearing a once tight family apart.

The power of money over people is as unique as snowflakes. Each person has his or her own unique reasons for pursuing it. For some, it may be to feed a family. For others, it may be to feed an ego.

As for me, money eventually became a high priority. And there was a lot of it in the smuggling business. But the money was always secondary to the excitement and the travel. It was never my main driving force.

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Coke Dust

It's 1974.

After that night at my ex-wife's house, when one of the Pushey brothers jammed a knife to my throat and demanded some cocaine, I developed a whole new perspective on partying and the social scene. Where I'd been a bit of an introvert before, now I became a full-fledged hermit. I think I got the feeling anyway when my mother started greeting me by saying "Hey the Hermit's here."

I found a tiny apartment that rented by the week in the downtown Toronto area, and hid out there, no

contact with family or friends. Or anybody.

But eventually my location got out, and the phone soon started ringing off the hook again with dealers calling for more coke. I wouldn’t answer the phone. It was obvious that most of these lunatics didn’t have the same sense of precaution and prudence that I did.

Or they were so hopped up on cocaine, hearing and seeing things that weren't there, that they'd lost touch with reality. Either way, they weren't my idea of trustworthy contacts, and definitely not the people hermits are keen to talk to.

But after a week goes by, I'm beginning to feel a little less panicky and a little more stir-crazy. So, one day when the phone rings, I decide to answer it.

It's Terry, the cute girlfriend of one-armed Jeff, one of the dealers I'd used in the already distant past. She's cute as a button, but she yaps so nonstop it makes you visualize putting a nice wide strip of duct tape over her mouth.

What she's yapping nonstop about today, though, is David Bowie. Not surprising – she's crazy about him and his music. She goes on to say that a friend of a friend of Jeff knows one of Bowie's roadies, and he says that Bowie likes to sample new batches of cocaine. Sort of like a wine connoisseur.

Supposedly, if we bring Bowie some cocaine, not only will we get a chance to meet him, but he'll invite us up to his hotel room.

This possibility momentarily snaps me out of the remnants of my deep depression and anxiety. I really like Bowie and his music myself. I even drove to Detroit to see his show live once. And what a show it

was, one you can never forget.

But my enthusiasm is tempered by the fact that Terry can be pretty whacky. The idea that we'll be lounging around in David Bowie's hotel room like old school chums sounds too wild and crazy to actually happen.

Plus, I'm in Toronto, Canada. The Bowie show is in Boston, U.S.A. – a completely different country. That means sneaking the cocaine through customs.

I tell her I'll have to think about it and get back to her.

She replies, "Don't take too long. He's only there for the weekend. You would have to arrive tonight to have a chance to meet him." Jeff and Terry are in Boston now to see the show so I'd have to grab a cab from the airport and try to be at the Ritz by midnight.

It all sounds incredibly risky and stupid. So I methodically think it over – looking at it logically and objectively – and finally reach a decision that can only be summarized as, "Oh, what the hell!"

I call her back and confirm that I'll do it. Hanging up, I immediately begin calling the airlines to make reservations.

It’s soon going to be dark outside, so I don’t have a lot of time to waste. I quickly get dressed, slipping two ounces of cocaine in my underwear, and grab a cab to the airport.

At the Toronto airport terminal, I go through “preclearance customs” for the USA. All I have to do is show my driver’s license. This is not only pre-911, but pre hijacking years, so I‘m talking literally no security whatsoever. I tell them the purpose of my visit – to attend a David Bowie concert in Boston for the weekend.

American customs officials are used to spoiled rich Canadian brats crossing the border to eat and shop and play, so I adopt that attitude. Fortunately, no one asks, “Excuse me, sir, do you have any cocaine for David Bowie hidden in your shorts?”

Before I know it, I’m on the plane. Bound for Boston with two ounces of pure Bolivian cocaine. So far, so good.

Again – if you’re a smuggler, never, ever say, “So far, so good.”

The plane ride is the scariest of my entire life ever. And I’ve been on a few bad ones over the years. We are in the middle of a thunderstorm, with fierce bolts of lightning flashing and winds that knock the plane all over the sky. As if it were no more than a

leaf being buffeted about by a stiff autumn breeze. We could feel the plane, not only dropping in altitude, but swinging violently sideways.

It's the early 70s, and the FAA doesn't have the weather technology it does today. A lot of really dangerous flying was slipping under the radar, so to speak. Flights that today would be grounded or redirected around a storm system routinely flew out, right on schedule. Some ended in disaster.

Somehow, this one lands safely. I can't help thinking, "Another close call." And I wonder once again if I've just been lucky, or if it's the work of some providential protector. In any case, I'm on the ground in the U.S.A., nothing like terra firma.

It's so wonderful getting off the plane in the United States and just walking out the door, as customs clearance was back in Canada. I quickly find a cab and head for the Ritz Carlton Boston.

I can't help but be amazed. Here I am – 24 years old, with two ounces of cocaine, on my way to possibly meet David Bowie. Ziggy Stardust, himself.

If it's true that Bowie likes to try different types of cocaine, then he's got a real treat ahead of him. He'll be sampling the best Bolivian cocaine that anyone has ever seen. Or snorted.

The bulk of all cocaine entering the US and Canada came from Colombia and Peru and was cut for the market and shipped in bulk.

This, on the other hand, is the freshest and purest cocaine possible, direct from the clandestine lab in the middle of the Bolivian jungle. Pure as the driven snow, so to speak.

In the Ritz Carlton lobby stands Terry and one-armed Jeff, waiting for me, beaming with anticipation.

But now – the moment of truth: Teeny bopper Terry approaches the front desk and says to the clerk, “We’re here to see David Bowie. We’ve been invited to his room. We were just waiting for his friend Hank from Canada.”

The clerk makes a phone call and tells us, “Someone will be down shortly.”

A few minutes later Bowie’s bodyguard Stewie steps out of the elevator and walks toward us. Stewie is a big black guy. He certainly has the appearance of a bodyguard – broad shoulders and muscular build – and, as I later find out, he’s an ex-British military man. But he also seems to have a calm, gentle disposition as well, which was very comforting and reflective of Bowie himself.

Even so, I'm half expecting him to tell us to get the hell out of here. But, surprisingly, he doesn't. "Follow me" he says, turns around and heads for the elevator.

He escorts us up to the penthouse suite and opens the door, where we spot Bowie all curled up on a big comfy hotel chair.

To Bowie's right is his dealer, who regularly supplies Bowie with cocaine when he comes to New York. And of course has to deliver the best stuff he can get to maintain a relationship with such a famous star.

The room is luxurious, a suite that looked as if it had been made just for an international star like Bowie. The only thing that looks out of place is us.

Stewie the Bodyguard goes to his position in front of the fireplace and crosses his arms, not particularly menacing, but effective nevertheless. Having cats all my life I couldn't help to notice the position Stewie chose was perfect. Being able to observe all angles of the room.

I'm sure he realizes that three little Jewish kids from Toronto can hardly be considered a threat. After all, Terry's only a five footer. And Jeff's not much taller. They are blabbering a mile a minute.

It's all too surreal. I can't believe it's actually

happening. Suddenly, something comes over me, almost like an anxiety attack. I become so nervous I can hardly speak a word. I don't even take off my jacket, keeping it on almost the entire night.

Here I am, a veteran of incredibly perilous drug smuggling ventures, freaking out in the presence of David Bowie. Too bizarre.

To this day, I still want to kick myself for not asking enough questions. But it isn't as if we all sit around quietly. One-armed Jeff and compulsive talker Terry certainly aren't shy. They bombard Bowie with questions. I'm just as content to listen to the answers from Bowie and watch him talk in real life. He spoke of future shows that ended up really happening, like performing with Bing Crosby.

Bowie looks completely at ease, he's answering questions as if this situation is nothing out of the ordinary. As if we were all equals he discusses many of the future acts he's thinking of doing.

I find this astonishing. Although I'm still in anxiety mode I begin to feel more comfortable, sit back and enjoy the pleasant conversation. Soon I come out of the anxiety attack, take off my jacket and come alive.

At one point, I describe my torturous flight into Boston's Logan Airport. Bowie's eyes opened up

wide. He seemed to completely understand and even empathize with my experience. Since he has a phobia of airplanes himself he listens intently, while looking directly into my eyes and grimacing at the story. Freaking me out as if I was just another person. He honestly wasn't displaying the ego of his fame.

Bowie's New York dealer is another Jew, named David. What is this, with all these Jews selling cocaine, I thought.

He begins preparing some of his cocaine on a room service plate, chopping away at it in a ritualistic yet hypnotic way. He's sitting next to Bowie and gives him the first snort. Protocol.

When Bowie's finished, he passes it on to us, and it makes its way around the room. I try David's stuff only once. It borders on horrible. Especially after what I'm used to.

I pull out my cocaine and begin making lines on another plate. And, when I think the time is right, I pass the plate over in Bowie's direction.

For a while, both plates are going around, and everyone is snorting and talking. Bowie does most of the talking, but I never detect any kind of bragging or ego on his part. It's almost as if Jeff, Terry and I are a focus group, and he's collecting feedback on

his ideas. He even infers to that during the night, saying he likes these talks with his fans.

Maybe snorting with his fans gives him the opportunity to garner firsthand information to better himself artistically. Or maybe he's just totally full of cocaine. Who knows? He does look amazingly strung out though.

He says he needs the cocaine for his creativity, and spends a small fortune on it. A small fortune? I'm thinking, a small fortune for you is probably a huge fortune for most anybody else.

Most of his ideas sound so strange, especially since he's still in the Ziggy Stardust phase of his career. For example, he talks about future routines he wants to do, such as Frank Sinatra style singing and dancing, complete with short hair and pinstripe suits. Seems pretty weird, but we listen in amazement anyway.

Bowie even asks us what we think. Of course, blabbermouth Terry chimes in immediately. Although, in this case, it probably isn't annoying, because she most likely represents the typical loyal female David Bowie fan.

Within a short time of Bowie trying my cocaine several times, the New York dealer's cocaine begins to collect on the sides. Only mine is being snorted.

Quality prevails.

I almost feel bad for David the Dealer. I'm tempted to tell him I'll be gone soon, back to Canada, and this primo cocaine will never challenge your mediocre shit again. It's really only for my loyal customers in Toronto anyway. But I don't say a word to him.

We had arrived at Bowie's room at 12:30 a.m. and we stayed until 6:30 in the morning. At which point Bowie says he should get some sleep for his two shows later that day. He gives us backstage passes for that night's performance, and we split, as the hippies say.

Several hours after we depart the hotel, I'm being hunted down by Bowie's men. They say he needs more cocaine for his evening show and he said yours was the best he ever had.

I have one ounce left and am happy to sell it to Bowie, since he's one of my favorite rock stars. Plus I don't relish the thought of smuggling it back into Canada.

I hope I'll get a second chance to meet with him. But it doesn't happen. Well at least I don't have to worry about smuggling the last ounce back to Canada. Just to hear that Bowie said something about the quality, and realized the difference, was like music to my

ears.

I figure maybe I'll get paid tomorrow. The next day Bowie either forgets about it or decides to rip me off. I'm not completely sure and don't even want to know. I've had enough illusions shattered over the years. I didn't need another.

But, even then, it wasn't a complete bust. I later use David Bowie as a reference. I discover that a big-time disco owner/cocaine dealer, Gerry K, has Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones as a customer. Gerry likes my cocaine, but says that unless I supply him exclusively, he'll stick with his regular supplier.

Being an enterprising young businessman, I don't let this stop me. I manage to get a package of my cocaine to Richards, via my good friend Clint.

Clinton was a true hippie and the brother of one of my sellers. He had a client that was the wife of a former Prime Minister. I won't say her name out of respect for the current PM, but who just happened to be entertaining with Keith Richards that evening.

Clint and I met at a waterfront hotel where she was staying in a penthouse suite with Richards in the next room. I was able to give Keith Richards a free sample, with a note that says, "David Bowie loved this stuff in NY. You will, too." That's all it took. Richards becomes a client. Ah, the power of a

celebrity endorsement.

Nevertheless, even though I got stiffed, the Bowie trip ends up being a good interlude for me. It gets my head out of the dumps and gives me a new lease on life. It’s such a surreal experience to sit in the luxury suite of a superstar. Snorting cocaine and talking about everything from the village in England where he grew up to all the new routines he wants to do when the glitter rock era is over. I didn’t think glitter rock was supposed to end. Bowie did.

He was a real visionary in his field. Throughout his career, he has anticipated and introduced new directions in music that his fans never saw coming.

Ten years later, I would be stunned to see him doing the very routines that he talked about that night. I can’t help but think my special pure Bolivian cocaine may have stoked his career. It’s possible under the influence of that clean pure cocaine ideas came out as he saw the end of glitter. But I can dream can’t I?

The most amazing thing was that he chatted with us nonstop till 6:30 in the morning. Without once appearing to get sick of us, and only asked us to leave when he was about to collapse from exhaustion. Staying up all night with us after his earlier performance and still having to prepare for

two upcoming shows requires stamina.

One final aside: I was always trying to find a frame of reference to use to describe my first boss and friend, Bernie. Someone to compare him to. There were certainly no characters on television or in books that he resembled.

But then it occurred to me – Bernie looked like David Bowie's title character in the movie, The Man Who Fell to Earth, a story about an extraterrestrial who crash lands on Earth seeking a way to ship water to his drought-plagued planet. Bernie always seemed a little alien and otherworldly, just like Bowie did in that movie, and in real life too.

You Can Always Go Home Again OR Mama’s Matzos Ain’t Nothin’ Compared to Her Moxie

With all due respect to American novelist, Thomas Wolfe, you can go home again. I did it often. And each time my mother was there to greet me with a huge smile.

Sometimes, however, she would meet me with a cute scowl on her face, to make sure I knew that she

really didn’t approve of what I was doing. But it would turn back to a grin soon enough.

Those were some of the best memories I have – coming home safe and sound, and my mother’s happiness at seeing me. That welcome-home smile meant everything, for I was always reminded of how much she loved me.

They were emotional homecomings. And comfortable. We didn't have to make conversation. We were just happy to be reunited.

Even though she no doubt worried about me and what I was doing for a living, she was no shrinking violet or nervous Nellie. There's no better example of this than my experience with one-armed Jeff and his loose-lipped, street-dealing brother, which I alluded to in discussing my "Playing Stupid" tactic.

Jeff Aaron is one of my cocaine sellers, and his younger brother's a street dealer for him, selling the cocaine I supply. Street dealers are notoriously careless and stupid. Jeff's brother is no exception. He gets caught by the cops and gives them my name as a possible way to get off the hook.

It couldn't have come at a worse time. Bernie and I are preparing to leave for Bolivia in a few days for a new cocaine supply.

Of course, I have no idea any of this is happening.

As a routine safety measure, I usually use one of the many phone booths in the plaza up the street from my mother's house for making phone calls, especially drug-related ones. She even refers to it as my "office."

One day I call her to check in, to see what's going

on.

Her voice isn't the same as usual. It's shaky. She sounds very nervous. She only gets a few words out. The last four are, "They're here for you."

Suddenly, a tough, no-nonsense man's voice comes on the phone. He says he's with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (aka the RCMP), and that I should come there immediately and talk to them.

At that point, I lose it. Forgetting he's a federal cop, I start screaming at him, demanding that he leave my poor mother alone and get the hell out of her house.

He stays cool, simply telling me to come there so we can all talk about it.

My mind is spinning like a top, and not a very steady top at that. I begin pacing, circling the plaza, trying to figure out what to do. I consider taking off, leaving the city, avoiding any kind of confrontation with the cops. It shouldn't be difficult. They'd have no idea where to find me.

But I quickly realize I can't do that. My favorite (and only) mother has been holding down the fort for me. I have to rescue her.

I do a quick mental inventory of my mother's house to determine whether there's any incriminating evidence there.

I think there are only small amounts of cocaine and some money in the house, both well hidden. My mother and I will have to work as a team to get rid of these guys. And, unfortunately, we'll have no time alone to map out any kind of plan.

But, regardless, I'm ready to go and face the music. I get in my car and drive the block and a half to my mother's house.

As I drive up, I can see there's an undercover cop car in the driveway. And when I step into the house, there are three plainclothes RCMP drug officers. They look cozy and oddly unthreatening, sitting with my mother at the kitchen table. I detect she's playing her part.

They start by saying that they know I'm involved with drugs and they want some information about my drug activities.

I immediately launch into "Playing Stupid" mode. "What?" "What are you talking about?" "I'm sorry, but you've got the wrong person." "I don't know who you've been talking to, but they obviously used my name to shift the blame away from them."

They don’t believe me, of course. But that’s okay. Playing Stupid will eventually wear everyone down. Unless they find some kind of evidence.

They ask to go downstairs and have a look around. What can I say? I’ve just assured them I’m completely innocent and have nothing to hide. “Sure,” I tell them. “Check out anything you want.” “There’s nothing here.”

They enter the laundry room and immediately spot a big bag of white powder on the counter.

Although panicky, I try to remain calm.

“Ha!” says one of them triumphantly. “Then what the hell is this?”

“Nothing,” I reply with more calm than I’m feeling. “It’s not mine. I have no idea what it is or where it came from.”

Then I take a closer look and realize it’s my sister’s henna hair dye. But I don’t tell them this.

A couple of the cops dash out to their car to test the powder. I stay behind with cop number 3.

While this is going on downstairs, my mother calls from upstairs to ask if she can go to the washroom. The officer tells her she can.

But instead of heading for the washroom, she goes into my old bedroom and closes the door behind her. She grabs a book from the bookshelf and extracts the bundle of money hidden in the middle of it. She quickly shoves it down her pants, where she knows they won't look.

Soon the two officers return from their car and the failed drug test, their RCMP tails tucked neatly between their RCMP legs.

They finish searching the house, coming up empty-handed. There's nothing left for them to do but try to scare the shit out of me.

They remind me that they have all the time in the world. "We'll be watching you," the possible leader says. "Someday, sooner or later, you'll slip up, and we'll be right there to get you"!

Instead of being a nice compassionate human being and try to guide me along the right path, he acts like a mean cop, only interested in putting someone behind bars.

Finally I can see this is about to end. None too soon. I'm a nervous wreck by now, and my legs are feeling wobbly. I muster what little strength I have left for the final few moments before they leave the house.

As they depart, the head cop hands me his card and

tells me to get in touch should I have anything to tell him. You bet, officer. I'll be sure and do that.

As they pull away, I'm so whipped, I'm ready to flop down on the bed, catch my breath and zone out for a while.

But my mother's standing at the front door with her purse, a plastic bag and car keys. "Get in the car," she demands. "We're putting this money in the safety deposit box at the bank, where it belongs."

I slip into the passenger seat, and she drives slowly up the street and in through the back entrance of the plaza, a short block and a half away, never saying a word. All the while scanning for cops tailing us. Not a word was spoken.

As we enter the parking area beside the bank, she breaks the silence by busting out in one of her loud, infectious laughs.

I stare at her incredulously. "Are you okay, what the hell are you laughing about"?

She simply glances back at me and says, "We're just like Bonnie and Clyde." That's it, just those six words, and then, like Bonnie and Clyde, we exit the vehicle and head for the bank.

Unbelievable! I discover that my cute, quiet

homemaker mother, who never worked a day in her life, is not quite as average and ordinary as I thought.

And how could I have suspected? She rarely misses bowling on Tuesday nights with the group. On Thursday evenings, she invariably plays Mahjong with her female friends. As far as I knew, she's just a typical Jewish mom. Turns out she's like a closet gun moll.

Instead of reaming me out, as I had half expected her to do, she trots into the bank with her bag of cash. While I wait in one of the comfy chairs, staring after her in awe. Within minutes, she exits the vault area and assures me with a wink that the money is now safe.

Over the years, she became my lifeline in many situations. She was consistently involved in many aspects of Bernie's operations, and how it pertained to me. Mostly because she wanted to keep her thrill-seeking son out of as much trouble as possible. A noble motive, as far as I'm concerned.

Even though my mother knew I smuggled drugs and had been stashing cash in her house, I don't think it was a matter of denial or looking the other way.

I think a mother's instinct is, and should be, the safety of her children. If one of her children's job or

chosen profession happens to be unsavory or downright illegal and dangerous, that doesn't change the fact that she's his or her mother. She'll do whatever she can to make sure her child is as secure as possible. That's what unconditional love is all about.

I used to lie down and think on the luxurious king size bed in my hotel room in Pakistan, while waiting for the heroin to arrive. What does my mother think, how worried is she? How could God let something happen to me and upset her life? The power of love, in my mind, is an incredibly strong and powerful thing. It keeps you going. And somehow keeps you safe. Even at very far distances.

Amazingly, my mother hardly ever criticized or condemned me about my career choice. Rather, she became an integral part of my life, helping me wherever and whenever she could.

Of course, the surprising thing was that, like me, she also seemed to enjoy the excitement. Whether vicariously through my occasional stories or right there in the trenches, staring down the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. And sharing a 'Bonnie and Clyde' moment with me.

Bernie and I had this in common – we both doted on our mothers. Whenever we returned from South America with a new supply of cocaine, before

anything else we would go see our mothers.

I would drop him off not too far from where my mother lived. Then I would go park in the nearby plaza, and walk to my mother's house for a great meal and a cozy bed.

Both of our mothers would indulge and pamper us like babies. Sometimes joking about our profession with lines like, "People should only know!"

After a while, most street dealers had heard of my name. But they didn't know where to find me or how to get in touch. I was commonly known as the elusive cocaine dealer that nobody ever saw. Sort of the Flying Dutchman of smugglers, you might say. I liked to hear what other people were heard saying about me. This would be, in my opinion, closely equivalent to what the police were also hearing.

Some of these dealers discovered where my mother lived and attempted to persuade her to contact me for them. But I had briefed her well in advance. Besides, she knew exactly how to handle them anyway.

She played an invaluable role in shielding me from everyone, as well as being an extra set of eyes and ears. She'd always get more information from those asking about me and my whereabouts than they ever got from her.

Over the years, I'm sure my mother went through more stress worrying about me than any other mother I knew. Yet, oddly enough, her hair didn't turn gray until after she was around sixty.

By contrast, many other mothers were camped out in the beauty parlors. Regularly dyeing their hair, as well as seeking treatments to reduce their wrinkles. Maybe the excitement balanced out the worry, almost working like a tonic. Who knows?

It was early 1989 in the basement of my house when I took my last hit of heroin. I drove to Montreal to see the infamous Dr. Emmanuel who put me on methadone. Dr. Emmanuel's career was somehow ruined by the CIA during the LSD experiments of the 1950's, that's about all I knew.

Then, on June 21st, 1994, I checked into a treatment center in Tijuana, Mexico, after I did my last two mg dose of methadone.

As many other landmark days it was on my mother's birthday, and seemed only fitting. After all, she always did her best to keep me safe and out of harm's way.

Less than half a year later, on January 6th, 1995, she died.

Behind Every Good Smuggler is a Good Accountant

Well, not actually.

Accountants keep records and ledger sheets. Accountants file tax reports. Smugglers hate records, ledger sheets and tax reports. Which leads to yet another cardinal rule of smuggling: Leave No Paper Trail.

Even so, drug smuggling is still a business. We have payables, receivables, assets and equity. We even have to pay attention to the bottom line. And I don’t mean a line of cocaine. Like any business, we have to make a profit.

Bernie and I even take the business side of smuggling a step further. We start our own corporation and name it Aardvark Enterprises. Why Aardvark? The name is Bernie's idea. He's fascinated with those funny looking creatures for some reason. I know he had an ugly dog when he was young that he seemed to love more than anything. Maybe aardvarks remind him of that dog. Or maybe he just hates ants. One thing I am certain of – it isn't so we'll be listed on the first page in the phonebook.

And what kind of corporation is Aardvark Enterprises? A retail operation, obviously. A retailer is part of a supply chain, buying product from a manufacturer or wholesaler, and then selling it to end users for a profit. Our product just happens to be cocaine.

We don't have a corporate mission statement, but I suppose if we did it would be something like, "Buy low, sell high, and have fun."

One of our first official corporate actions is to arrange for a shipment to be delivered to Aardvark Enterprises as commercial freight.

It involves our third trip to Bolivia. A person might wonder why we'd go back a second and third time to that place after experiencing a military coup and the multiple taxi rides to Peru. To put it in terms of a retail operation, we have to replenish our inventory. It's cocaine, of course, but inventory nonetheless.

Aging beatnik Arturo and his girlfriend are sent to La Paz by the corporation (i.e. Bernie and me) to buy the product, package it and mail it to Aardvark Enterprises.

Bernie and I go as well, but separately, not associating with Arturo and his girlfriend. We're there just in case they need us. And to enjoy ourselves, of course. (See proposed Mission

Statement above.)

Once we know they've shipped it, we wait a couple weeks, since it can take a while for a shipment to make it from Bolivia to Canada.

Aardvark Enterprises may be a certified corporation, but we have no actual physical corporate location. Yet we needed an address to ship to. Not surprisingly, no one we knew was interested in receiving a couple of kilos of cocaine through the mail.

Since this was only my third smuggling experience with Bernie, I felt that I was still in the process of proving myself. So I had volunteered … my mother's house.

I'm back in Toronto, staying at my mother's home and waiting for the shipment. I'm also stressing out. The days seem to drag by at a snail's pace.

Finally, when I can't stand it any longer, I call the airfreight office to ask if a box has arrived for Aardvark Enterprises. The person on the other end of the line sounds very suspicious. He tells me he thinks so, but to call back later to see if it has been cleared through customs.

Then, after about three hours, I get a call from someone else at the freight forwarders office telling

me the package has been cleared.

I say, “Good. I’ll be down to pick it up.”

I had already scoped out the offices at the airport cargo terminal so that I’d be comfortable driving there and claiming the package.

But the man on the phone says, “No. We’ll deliver it.”

This doesn’t sound right to me, not that I would know anything about how freight forwarders work or about the procedures for importing goods into Canada.

I try repeatedly to convince him that it would be easier for me to pick it up. But he’s adamant. It has to be delivered. I finally agree. Not much choice.

Panic time. Why the hell would they deliver it here? I told him it was a residence, but that didn’t deter him. A corporate headquarters is one thing, but a private home? This doesn’t feel right.

My first instinct is to get the hell out of there. But my poor mummy, whom I’ve naively implicated, is innocently darting about the house, doing laundry and house cleaning, oblivious to everything.

I wait on the porch. It’s a gorgeous spring day, with

the lilies of the valley in front all in bloom. An old wives' tale say they keep your house safe. But I scarcely notice. I'm too worried that our world is about to come crashing down on us.

I can't take the suspense much longer. My mouth is dry, I'm pacing.

A car slowly pulls up in front of the house. The driver is husky, over six feet tall, and his shirt doesn't have the name of any courier service on it. And he looks like a cop.

And if he's not a cop, why in hell is he driving in a car? What freight forwarder sends a single car to deliver one box? Shouldn't it at least be a truck or a delivery van? Plus, there's no identification or logo on the vehicle.

My legs are like jelly, and my body's vibrating. I'm dizzy and don't feel as if I can even speak. I slowly make my way, almost zombie like, towards the car, preparing to face the inevitable.

The man opens the door, removes a package from the back seat and asks, "Are you Mr. Cooper?"

I'm barely able to reply, "Yes."

“Of Aardvark Enterprises?”

“Yes.”

As he hands me the package, I quickly glance around, half expecting to be jumped or surrounded.

After signing for the package, I walk back to the house with it, noticing the driver watching me oddly. Or at least it seems like he is. I’m so terrified, I don’t know what’s real and what isn’t.

As the car drives away, I enter the house with my package. My mother’s waiting. “What’s that?” she asks. “Who was in the car?”

“It’s a package for me from Bolivia.”

“You’re getting to be just like your daddy, what with all his coming and going of packages.”

I leave it at that.

The more I think about it, the more I’m convinced that the guy was a cop. So, whatever they’re expecting me to do –I better not be doing that. The problem is that I have no idea what they’re expecting me to do.

From now on, I have to assume I’m being watched to find out who I’m working with so they can bust up as

much of the network as possible. I'll have to completely change course by becoming unpredictable and developing an entirely new clientele.

But, hey, no one said running a corporation was easy.

In business, the marketplace can be a hostile environment. If a company hopes to succeed, it has to aggressively stay ahead of the competition by anticipating new trends and keeping up with the latest advances.

It's no different with the business of smuggling. But our competitors aren't so much other smugglers but customs agents and law enforcement. We have to stay ahead of them and their latest methods of drug detection.

When Bernie and I started working together, on that first trip to Bolivia, we weren't too sophisticated. We packed the cocaine in a cardboard box. A cardboard box. Then we mailed the box from Peru to our contact, Arturo, in Canada. It worked fine.

Nevertheless, for the third Bolivian trip, we change tactics. Mostly it's the result of Arturo and his girlfriend making the next buying trip to Bolivia and wanting to try a different approach.

At a meeting with them, they tell us they're going to make a dog cage with a false bottom. Arturo has two small travelling dogs that will accompany them to Bolivia. (Travelling with an empty dog cage might look a little suspicious.) Once there, he and his girlfriend will purchase the cocaine, secure it in the false floor and fly back to Canada.

Bernie and I will leave for Bolivia on a separate flight. We'll connect with them in La Paz at a specified time and place (a hotel where none of us are staying), and for only brief intervals.

Initially, I didn't even think I'd have to go on this trip. I thought I'd get to remain in Toronto to sell the rest of the cocaine. Fine by me. Less dangerous. But Bernie decides after all that he and I should go as well. Just in case Arturo and/or his girlfriend run into trouble.

Bernie gives them their airline tickets, and we wish them good luck and safe passage. They head off into the night, seemingly quite confident with the dog cage ploy.

Bernie and I remain behind to finalize our plans, but the first thing out of my mouth is, "A dog cage? How the hell do we know they won't get checked at customs when they get to the airport? Isn't this really risky?"

He doesn’t reply at first, but then says, “Go get in the car.”

“Why?” I ask. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll find out,” is his only response.

We drive to an apartment complex near Toronto International Airport. Bernie pushes the buzzer, the security door opens, and we take the elevator to the eighth floor.

Bernie knocks on an apartment, and a man opens the door wearing a Canada Customs uniform.

Sure enough, it’s a Customs agent, a young guy, a Canadian citizen of Peruvian descent. He’s still in his uniform because he just got home from work.

He invites us inside, and Bernie tells him about Arturo and his girlfriend, that they’ll be flying back into Canada with cocaine hidden under the floor of their dog cage.

Bernie shows him pictures of them and gives him their passport numbers and birthdates as well as their return date, the airline and the flight number.

The customs agent assures Bernie that he’ll work the shift on that night, and he’ll make sure he’s stationed in the customs area that clears flights from

South America.

I discover that customs agents receive a secret code each day in their briefing that allows them to advise the next agent down the line whether or not to search a person's luggage after he or she picks it up.

The customs guy turns out to be a really nice guy. How nice? Well, after a long pleasant conversation, Bernie and I get ready to leave. The agent goes to his closet and retrieves something. "Here," he says to me, "a souvenir for you."

He hands me an authentic Canadian Customs blue shirt, including the official badge on the arm. I'm stunned. For a cocaine smuggler, this is the best gift I can imagine.

The amazing thing is that the agent doesn't ask for any money or special favors. Why he agrees to help our smuggling operation, I have no idea. Later, I ask Bernie how he knows all these different types of people, all likeable, hardworking guys in their respected fields and yet willing to take part in an international drug deal. Bernie keeps the information to himself.

On the way home, Bernie and I discuss the upcoming trip. He asks me what I think about just sending Arturo and his girlfriend alone, let them do their thing and then return to be ushered through

customs by our inside man.

I ask him how well he knows Arturo. He says, “So-so.”

I tell him he seems loyal enough to me. And both Arturo and his girlfriend don’t appear to be a real threat to double-cross us. But they’re also a little naïve. Neither seems to know much about how or where to sell the cocaine, nor do they appear to have the personality for it. Their lifestyle is more playing jazz and creating arts and crafts projects together. But we stick to our original plan and go to Bolivia as well.

The next day, I take Arturo the US cash to buy the cocaine. Neither he nor his girlfriend seems nervous at all. Even though they’re both new to this, they appear quite comfortable in the role of professional smugglers.

Whereas the first trip to Bolivia was fraught with danger and anxiety, this third one is a piece of cake, from beginning to end.

Arturo and his girlfriend get on the plane with their two dogs, go to Bolivia, buy the cocaine, and put it in the false bottom of the dog cage. They travel around for two weeks, then fly home to our Peruvian agent, who waves them safely through Toronto International Airport customs.

Arturo calls us as soon as he's safely in the country, and we arrange to meet at an old farmhouse, where Arturo lives with his old aunt. The place is on a rural dirt side road in rural Northern Ontario. There are no neighbors for miles in any direction.

Again – how does Bernie find these people? Here's a guy out in the middle of nowhere, living a quiet bohemian lifestyle, who flies down to South America with two dogs and then back with a cage of concealed cocaine. I never know how Bernie makes these connections. I chalk it up as just one more of the many mysteries surrounding him.

In any case, Arturo and his girlfriend are well paid. As soon as I sell the first batch of the cocaine they brought back, I drive out to the secluded farmhouse and give them $3000 for their trouble.

And as far as the Canadian Customs agent, I can only assume Bernie compensated him one way or another.

On the next trip to South America – the third – we're back to the first courier we tried, the Bolivian Post Office, but now adopt yet another smuggling method.

Arturo and his girlfriend are also arranging this excursion. He's planning on buying a bolt of Bolivian cotton and cutting a hole in the center of the

material, where he will meticulously hide the cocaine.

Assuming there's no military coup attempt and the Post Office is working, the package will be sent as commercial goods to our new corporate entity, Aardvark Enterprises.

Everything goes according to plan. I fly home in order to accept the package at my mother's house when it arrives. My ensuing trauma and sweating-of-bullets was detailed at the beginning of this chapter.

Another fairly common business practice is corporate relocation. We're no exception. In late 1975, we decide to move our headquarters to Cali, a big bustling city in western Colombia.

And why not? After several trips to Bolivia, Bernie's safety deposit box is stuffed with cash. And I'm not doing too shabby myself. Plus, after the anxiety of the last couple of years, we're ready for a little more laidback lifestyle.

I stay behind in Canada, and Bernie goes to Colombia to locate a place to live.

He ends up renting a house in an upscale part of town, known to us as Calle Ocho. Our neighbors are all professionals, very sophisticated well-dressed people. And, given our occupation, we soon meet

many worldwide drug dealers, a real smorgasbord of characters, such as the son of a Swiss police chief, a secretive artist, a classy Parisian chef and a Jew from Calcutta, named Eli, and his two brothers.

Not long after we arrive, Bernie takes a liking to the shy, very chubby, 15-year-old son of our next-door neighbor. He says it's because the kid reminds him of himself at that age.

Bernie calls the kid "Gordo," which means "fat" in Spanish, and he visits the boy frequently before and after school.

No one seems to mind the disparaging nickname or Bernie befriending the kid. In fact, the boy goes through an amazing transformation due to Bernie's influence. He develops into a confident outgoing young man.

Gordo's parents are not only astonished, but grateful. One positive side effect of this is that if our neighbors ever had any suspicions about the activities going on in our house, they no longer care. Bernie had improved their son's life more than they could ever have imagined.

Our house quickly becomes very popular among the expatriate community. It's the in-place. And although I'm well-liked, I can assure you it's not me that causes our house to be so popular.

It’s Bernie. He makes such an impression on people they can’t resist dropping by at least once a day. Our house is like a post-hippie elite club for worldwide smugglers. There’s never a period of calm and quiet.

People are all over the house, involved in anything from having coffee in the kitchen to finding an abandoned bedroom for a romantic interlude. A lot of cocaine is snorted, but everyone’s cool and discrete about it. After all, these are all professional smugglers and live by the smuggler’s code: Snort in another’s home as you would have them snort in yours.

As with any corporate relocation, we soon have to make a decision about our company’s future growth. We figure it comes down to two choices – go big time like the Florida pot smugglers with their mother ship and huge employee roster or stay small, lean and mean, flying under the radar, like most of the smugglers who visit us.

We choose lean and mean. It’s cleaner and safer, with virtually no overhead.

In the meantime, the Jewish Eli and his brothers from India have become our good friends, almost like family. They help us frequently, without ever asking for anything in return.

It’s now been many months since we first set up house in Cali. We haven’t been very productive. Unless you call eating great steaks, going to wild parties and chasing cute Colombian girls productive. Which, actually, I do.

Nevertheless, it’s time to get back to business.

Eli and his brothers have been telling us that there’s a new way of smuggling that’s practically foolproof, and they’re willing to show us. Foolproof? Sign us up.

But they don’t want a lot of people around. At our house, there’s always a crowd hanging out, so we tell everyone we’re having a private poker game. It works. That evening, we have the place to ourselves, plus our three Jewish friends from India and a few other people they’ve invited.

At first, we just chit chat, discussing different smuggling routes via Europe, which mainly interests the three brothers. It’s gratifying to find out that we’re much more knowledgeable about how to sidestep the system than most.

But we all agree that it’s getting riskier sending large packages back home. Bernie and I had already lost Ivan, our pre-Arturo Canadian contact for our

second Bolivian trip. A package was sent to his house, just like the one sent to my mother's house.

He called Bernie and said he sees cops parked across the street. Bernie told him to forget the whole thing and don't accept anything. He refused to listen to Bernie and when the package was delivered that day he signed for it and took it into his house. Ten minutes later the cops from across the street burst in, found the cocaine and took him to jail. He ended up getting a fourteen year sentence.

After talking for a while, it's time to hear about this new smuggling technique.

Corporate life isn't always pleasant. You might have to fire people. You might have to lose a huge customer. Any number of things. Basically, it comes down to this – sometimes you have to make sacrifices, difficult choices, in order to be successful. I'm about to learn this firsthand.

Eli and his brothers begin ushering each of us, one-at-a-time, into a nearby room. Bernie's first, another guy, second, and I'm to be third.

When Bernie and the other guy return, neither makes eye contact or emits a sound, except for a soft groan. I'm starting to get nervous.

It’s my turn. I go in the room, and Eli tells me to lie down on the couch. One of his brothers enters with a jar of Vaseline and three golf ball sized spheres of cocaine that have been compressed and wrapped tightly inside several condoms.

Suddenly, I understand. These things are supposed to go up my ass.

My first instinct is to blurt out, “Are you crazy? I can’t do that!”

“Sure you can,” assures Eli. “We’ll show you. It’s easy.”

Easy? This “procedure,” as they call it, is a lot of things, but “easy” ain’t one of them.

But everyone else is doing it, including my boss, Bernie. How can I not?

They tell me what I have to do. (Because they sure as hell aren’t going to do it for me.) Eli says, “Take a good size dab of Vaseline and massage it all around the inside of your rectum. Then take one of these balls of cocaine that’s been soaking in a bowl of K-Y Jelly, and, without letting it squirt out of your fingers, guide it up your ass until it’s high enough to be sucked up the rest of the way on its own.” Say what?

I try one last time to talk them out of it. But I don't get very far before I realize I have to snap out of it and get with the program. Unless I intend to quit right then and there, which I'm not going to do.

"Come on, you big baby," I tell myself. "It's nothing but an oversized suppository. People take suppositories all the time."

So I assume the position, so to speak, and begin to maneuver the ball up my rectum. But it keeps popping back out. I'm about to give up. "I can't do it," I tell them. "It won't stay."

"That's normal," says Eli. "Just keep pushing. It'll go up nice and smoothly."

He's right. I give it another try, and, this time, it gets sucked up inside. It's like it just disappeared. Then I have to go sit on the toilet to remove it. So much for rehearsal.

A few days later, we're ready for the real thing.

Eli and his brothers will take theirs to India. The police chief's son will head for Switzerland. Bernie and I will be bound for Canada. We'll all meet back in Cali in about three months.

The next day, we go to a friend's travel agency in Cali to make air arrangements for each of our

destinations. Bernie will return to Cali as soon as possible, because he loves our house and lifestyle. I'll remain in Toronto to sell the cocaine, before I make it back.

Everyone plans on sleeping at our house the night before our flights. But first things first. A kilo of cocaine is delivered to us. We all sit cross legged on the floor and package it up. Golf ball size, wrapped in condoms, ready for tomorrow's "procedure," which is the euphemism meaning, of course, stuffing them up our rears.

We each put our personal balls, so to speak, safely away in our rooms and then go out for a little dinner and dancing before our flights in the early morning.

Cali is a fairly wild city during those days, especially for the young smugglers just getting into the cocaine trade. After a nice meal, we hit the salsa clubs and eventually end up at a big dealer's hacienda in the hills. Just to make sure we realize that he's a big time dealer, he stations a bunch of guards around his hacienda with machine guns.

We don't stay too late, since we need enough sleep to be alert and on top of our game for our morning flights. Even smuggling the balls inside our bodies, we always have to be well prepared, mentally and physically. So that no shadow of doubt or nervousness exists for anyone to observe.

Also, when we get back, we all take a laxative before bed, so we can clear enough room for our cargo. We're told that the worst thing is to not have enough room for the balls, especially if we might be spending up to 48 hours in transit. The last thing you want is trouble down in the old intestinal tract.

Early the next morning, the maid arrives to make us some delicious coffee (using the sock, as usual). The coffee plus last night's laxative do the trick, and soon we're ready for the "procedure."

Everyone except Bernie and I shove five balls up his backside. Bernie and I put three. We're rookies, after all.

As uncomfortable as it might sound, Bernie and I actually forget about the balls till we arrive in Canada.

We check into the airport hotel, and then take turns going into the bathroom to remove the balls. What a feeling of relief, almost exhilaration. Now all I have to do is sell enough of this stuff to afford a ticket for Bernie to head back to Cali. ASAP, as far as he's concerned.

Another common strategy in the corporate world is to cut out the middleman to increase profit margin. By transporting the cocaine ourselves, that's exactly what we did. Unfortunately for Arturo and his

girlfriend, they're one of the "middlemen" we cut out. We're no longer paying for their flights, hotels, food, personal cocaine, and their fees.

We have to take more of the risk now, but the greater the risk, the greater … well, you know.

Learning this new method of smuggling, this "procedure" turns out to be a major step in our business success. It makes us more independent, increases our profitability and enhances our safety, since we no longer have so many people aware of our business.

But it also infuriates a number of people, who, like Arturo, made a lot of money and scored a lot of cocaine by doing freelance work for us. Including exotic trips, cash, cocaine and excitement, which is frequently the main perk.

Bernie and I realize we have to be extra careful, because these disgruntled former employees might want to get even. Getting even with a smuggler means either killing him or ratting out to the cops, neither option is very appealing to us.

And as far as bum smuggling –Eli and his brothers were right. This method was so new and unique that it would be years before it became well known to customs officials. Then, of course, we'd have to come up with a new "procedure."

I was introduced to one new smuggling method many years later, on one of my later trips to Pakistan. I'm meeting my old friend and heroin source, Nazir Qasi, who's now a wealthy man. I'm into heroin now, "into" as in addicted.

Nazir has many people working for him in Karachi, from mules who transport the drugs to chemists who come up with novel ways of concealing the heroin.

I'm taken to one of these chemists. He lives in a tiny hut, with a small wooden bed in one corner and a huge cauldron type pot for boiling something.

Apparently, this chemist is a self-taught genius. I'm told he can make flying machines out of trash. But his most amazing new development is a system to dissolve the heroin and permeate clothing with it, which can later be washed, and the heroin extracted.

Nazir and I return to his house, where he introduces me to a friend who was a Pakistani cop in Peshawar for many years. He has since moved to a small town in Scotland, where he is a police officer there.

His name is Khalid. He's quite tall, with a strong build, the kind of cop that would make a criminal cower in fright. He's very nice to me, and we get along well, but not until he accompanies me on a long chatty walk. This I assume is so he can decide

whether he should trust me or not. Fortunately, I make the cut.

Khalid heads back to Scotland with the heroin infused clothing, while I stay in Karachi a few weeks longer waiting to hear from him.

Finally, I get the okay from Nazir to travel to Khalid's house. And I can go make travel arrangements to meet him in Scotland.

I take a flight to London, Heathrow Airport, where I connect to a city in Scotland I've never heard of. It's a cozy, picturesque town, especially compared to Peshawar, where the garbage builds up for months and people crap on the sides of the road. Creating a deadly breeding ground for flies and mosquitoes.

It turns out that Khalid is a distinguished officer with many years of experience. He invites me to his home, where I meet his family. They all dress in traditional Pakistani style clothing, not conforming at all to the more casual Scottish way of life.

Even though his wife and kids are white Scottish women. I get the feeling he runs a tight Muslim household. And the daughters hate it like poison and spend their days crying. To make things even worse, he later moves them all to Peshawar to live a pure Muslim life of being covered and hidden inside a house.

He hands me a white Levi's corduroy jacket with matching trousers, and instructs me to pack them in my bag. They're so authentic they still have the Levi's labels intact. It's incredible that this setup came from a brilliant pauper chemist in the wilds of Pakistan. He developed this new smuggling strategy just so he could make a few extra rupees to survive.

It was many years later before I heard about this smuggling method on CNN, BBC and some other networks. I have a funny feeling that I was the first one to try it.

It was the last heroin smuggling trip I ever made.

Another key ingredient for business success is a stable management team. In our case, that would be Bernie and me. It's a great partnership – characterized by mutual trust, respect and friendship.

But then something happens.

Applying my Smuggling Rule # 4 (Caution, caution and then a little more caution), I'm careful to continually vary my activities, especially when making phone calls.

I still use the phone booths in the plaza. But, because of my sister, there's another option. She has a lot of girlfriends. Most of whom like me. As a

result, they let me use their home phones to call Colombia, for which I repay them with generous amounts of cocaine. Everybody's happy.

Sherry's one of these friends. One day, I'm at Sherry's house and call Bernie to tell him to expect me in a day or two.

Bernie tells me he's fallen in love and intends to get married. I'm floored. Love? Marriage? These are words I didn't know were even in his vocabulary. And he's never struck me as a family man or a one-woman guy. They say love works in strange ways. It must be true. This certainly qualifies.

The next day, I jump on a plane to Miami to try and catch the direct flight to Cali, Colombia. My Miami leg lands late, and I have to run like a maniac to attempt to make my Cali connection. But when I get to the gate, I see the Ecuadorian Airlines plane through the window slowly backing up, engines whirling preparing for takeoff. I ask the man at the gate if I can still get on it, but, of course, the answer is no. I'm really disappointed, since I'm itching to get back and hear what the hell has happened.

I call Bernie and tell him I missed the plane, and that I'll catch the later flight that goes through Bogota.

Later that evening, he picks me up at the airport.

Almost immediately, he verifies his previous phone confession – he's fallen completely in love. She's Colombian, and her name is Clarita. He admits he has no idea what's come over him, but, whatever it is, he likes it and intends to go with it. He tells me he's like a completely different person. Soon enough, I discover this is absolutely accurate.

Lately, our house has been hopping with a whole new crew of transients, since Cali was becoming a hotspot for young backpacking Americans looking for a thrill. It's a zoo. And even though a maid routinely comes in to clean, she can barely stay on top of it.

But, stepping into the house this time, it's obvious the atmosphere has changed. There's a whole different feel to the place. As if a woman's touch had been added to the mix. Bernie is constantly bringing home beautiful bouquets of flowers for Clarita. Vases brimming with these flowers are in all the rooms. The house is spotless. Bernie's room, which is normally a pig sty, is immaculate.

And that's only the beginning. He's like a perfect gentleman around Clarita. He holds the door open for her, buys her gifts, and defers to her in every possible way. He's so chivalrous and gallant, he makes Sir Lancelot seem like a rude, insensitive lout.

The courtship doesn’t last long. In no time, they’re ready to get married.

It’s a very small, personal wedding, just a few close friends, like Eli and his brothers and the son of the Swiss police chief. Clarita’s mother and father are also both there, even though they no longer live together.

Her parents are upper class people and fairly wealthy. Rich people in Cali are a very strange bunch anyway, usually pursuing a lifestyle of fast living, fast dancing and fast driving, without any concern for the cost of anything.

In keeping with this profile, Clarita’s father drives antique Mercedes Benz cars. Periodically smashing them up when he’s drunk as a skunk and then getting them totally repaired and repeating the process.

After the wedding, a completely different set of people are allowed in the house. Clarita bans the more unsavory characters. Our house becomes an international hangout for the intellectual world travelers who are seeking a touch of excitement. It becomes a fascinating and stimulating environment.

And there’s now a protocol for first-time visitors. They’re not even allowed past the large entry room. Arturo, who has been with us the longest, quizzes

these newcomers to pre-qualify them, to determine their real intentions and make sure that everyone stays safe. Fortunately, Arturo's tough enough to enforce his decisions, and nothing serious ever happens to anyone.

With Bernie's marriage, the management team of Aardvark Enterprises changes. There's no more talk of smuggling, selling, Vaseline or K-Y Jelly, which is a huge relief for me. Bernie and I have enough money, so we more or less settle in for the long haul, enjoying the good life in Cali.

But for me, the "long haul" proves to be a little shorter than I expected. I start getting itchy feet. By 1978, I'm back in Toronto, beginning to work with a new partner, Bruce Fink, who is smuggling heroin from Southeast Asia.

Bernie and his new wife Clarita are still living in Cali. But they're not exactly what you'd call thrifty, so it's not long before they begin running out of money.

Bernie decides to buy a house in Toronto for him and Clarita. Not only is it a stable economic environment, one of the best real estate investment cities in the world, but he's familiar with it. He grew up there.

He locates a house in no time, buys it and begins

moving in. Clarita's still in Cali, waiting for him to send for her.

When I get back from a drug trip to Thailand with Bruce, I visit Bernie in his new house. It's the first time I've seen him in a year.

But it's not the same old Bernie. There's no talk of partying or going out on the town. He's now totally committed to his life with Clarita, and he wants to have kids. And his attitude is much more businesslike than before. I find that I miss the free-spirited Bernie that I remember. But he's still the perfect gentleman, host and friend. It's sad when people grow up.

Even though we're both 28, he's now all about settling down, while I'm not quite ready to give up the adrenaline rush.

But not everything about Bernie has changed – he still likes his cocaine. We stay up most of the night talking and snorting, not necessarily in that order.

There is one other thing that's changed with Bernie – he needs money. He's spent most of what he had on the new house.

I tell him about Bruce and the heroin business in Thailand. He'd been to Thailand many years before, but had never smuggled from there. His ears perk

up when I come to the part about 10 bucks of heroin selling for 1000 bucks in Canada (as compared to $10 of cocaine selling for $100). But I also tell him about the Bangkok airport sign: “WARNING: For anybody attempting to smuggle in or out of the Kingdom of Thailand, punishment is death for Thais and 35 years for foreigners.”

After I finish, he has one question: “When can we start?”

“Anytime you’re ready,” I reply.

Within days, Bernie locks up his new house in Toronto and flies to Cali. He will try to sell everything he can to come up with enough money for us to do a couple of big heroin shipments. He’s enthused. It’ll mean a real nest egg for him. He figures he’ll be set for life.

So I discover you can lose a partner to marriage. But that’s not the worst loss.

It’s just before Easter of 1980. The 30-year-old Bernie is in Canada, preparing to return to Cali. Since Colombia is a big Catholic country, Easter celebrations are already taking place there.

It’s Easter Sunday, April 7, 1980. Four of Bernie’s friends stop by his place in Cali to visit and pay their respects on the religious holiday. They ring the

doorbell.

Bernie and Clarita now live in a two-story house with a 30-foot-long sidewalk leading to the street.

The door’s locked, and there’s no maid to answer it. Bernie’s normal practice in this situation is to throw the keys down from the upstairs window so his guests can let themselves in. One reason for this is that he’s usually snorted so much cocaine that the trip downstairs to answer the door would leave him breathless and covered in sweat.

During the night before, a big electrical storm had blown in the windows. Bernie is cleaning up when the guests arrive.

He tosses out the keys, a sizeable number connected with a chain. Everyone’s aghast when they see the keychain get snagged, out of reach, on the edge of a snapped utility pole with dangling 220 Volt wires. A result of the previous night’s storm.

Bernie never wears underwear, and, in the intense heat of Colombia, frequently wears no clothes at all.

He eyes the keys, and then glances around the room, spotting a metal pole that looks long enough to knock the keys free. Since the window’s been blown out from the storm, he figures he can easily maneuver the pole out the gaping hole.

In his bare feet, holding a metal pole, Bernie gently nudges the metal keys, nobody uttering a sound for fear of hampering his concentration.

But the second the metal pole and the metal keys make contact, he's electrocuted. It's so sudden and violent that his body is catapulted into the high ceiling of the room, his head busting a hole in it. His body then ricochets out the window to the cement sidewalk below, breaking his neck.

When the paramedics and police arrive they classify it as an accident or "An act of God."

Thankfully, I wasn't there. It was devastating enough just hearing about it. I'm not sure where Clarita was, but she wasn't home either. All I know was from eyewitnesses and from what his mother was able to find out from the Colombian authorities.

Bernie's mother, Mary, was in financial straits at the time. I'm not sure why. She'd owned an upscale, pricey antique store for over 25 years on Eglinton Avenue, catering mostly to the rich people of Forest Hills. Plus, nobody else in Bernie's family, and none of his friends, could come up with the money to bring him home.

So I approached Bernie's mother about my contacting the rabbis of Cali, who preside over a longstanding Jewish community, to arrange to have

Bernie’s body shipped back to Canada.

I provided the necessary money and, in a couple days, we were attending a funeral at an old established Jewish cemetery in the north end of Toronto.

On his gravestone, his name is given as Bernard Abraham Shull. The last name has been used for centuries and comes from a Middle High German (or Yiddish) word meaning “synagogue.” No results found at all for "Bernard Abraham Shull" when Googled. Nothing comes up on either him or any family member. It’s as if none of them ever existed.

Personal note: Sixteen years later, my mother was buried in the same cemetery and six years after that, my father. I find it comforting that I can visit them all together in one place.

Today, more than 40 years later, I still miss him. And I find myself wondering: What’s the real story behind this unique, mysterious person? And why did our paths end up crossing? Was it destiny? Or blind luck?

While he was alive, he lived a charmed life – trusting his gut, making countless friends all over the world, touching the lives of almost everyone he met and

defying the odds by continually taking wild chances.

But in the end, it was chance that killed him – a violent storm that blew out the windows and knocked down a utility pole, unexpected Easter Sunday morning guests, and his keys getting hung up on the pole.

Who can account for such things? It sure as hell ain’t a corporate accountant.

If At First You Don’t Succeed, Try a Different Boat

This story starts as a result of the Aardvark Enterprises delivery to my mother’s house and the ensuing paranoia when the suspicious delivery man, who acts like a cop, delivers the cocaine.

And always in the back of my mind is my experience with the RCMP officers who had shown up at the same house looking for cocaine. And finally, before they left empty-handed, said they have all the time in the world to monitor me and wait till I do something stupid to incriminate myself.

So, particularly after that nail-biting Aardvark Enterprises delivery scenario, I can only assume I’m being watched. To find out who I work with so they can nab me, Bernie, Arturo and even the Customs Agent. As a result, I have to do a complete 180, changing both my clientele and my “MO” (Method of Operation).

I’m not excited about telling Bernie about the Aardvark delivery, but he always wants to know the truth, whether it’s good or bad. Obviously, this qualifies as bad. But he always says that you make better decisions when you’re dealing with the truth, as painful as it might be. He’s right, of course.

Bernie agrees with me that there’s a good chance the cops are trying to set us up in the near future by watching me. He still can’t believe they just delivered it and left instead of coming in later and busting me as they did to Ivan on trip #2.

Ivan never talked and hence didn’t lead the investigators to me or Bernie. Instead they thought they would allow this shipment to go through and just watch my activities. What to do? Leave town? At least. But better yet, leave the country.

We make our separate ways, down to Key West, Florida – the Conch Republic and home of Ernest Hemingway – for a little R & R. Coincidentally, we find out we have a couple of friends from our old Toronto neighbourhood down that way, too – Henry and Walter. They’re staying right up the coast in Vero Beach, about 300 miles northeast of Key West.

Henry is yet another Jew, kind of a funny guy – glib, and with enough quick patter to charm just about anyone. He’s also flashy, image-conscious and a bit of a swashbuckler. For example, if he only had a few

hundred bucks, he'd keep a single hundred dollar bill and place it on the top of all the rest of his money, which he would have converted into ones and fives. Then, whenever he pulled this huge wad of cash out of his pocket, a person would see the hundred and assume there were probably a bunch of hundreds in that roll of bills.

Walter, on the other hand, is a native Indian from a reservation in Ontario, but also spanned both sides of the border. To me, he is quite unique – I'd never known an Indian before, especially a smuggling one. He's quiet and reserved, reminding me of a Jewish banker. I like him a lot. He's down to earth, the complete opposite of Henry. He is also the boyfriend of ex-wife Brenda's older sister, Carole. Small world.

But together, they make a good pair, sort of like Bernie and me. Except we'd been born in the 50s, and they were born in the 40s. Big difference in my opinion.

And why are two Canadians in Vero Beach, Florida? They're involved in smuggling boatloads of pot from Cartagena, on the coast of Colombia. Currently they're sequestered in a large rented mansion with a group of people from around the US, all assigned to various jobs in the smuggling operation, all awaiting a shipment of pot from Colombia.

The marijuana is transported from Colombia on

large boats they call mother ships, which will anchor outside the U.S. territorial waters. Then ultra-fast Cigarette speed boats will zip out to the ship, collect as many bales of pot it can hold and bring it back to shore. Back and forth all night long from what I'm told.

Walter will pilot one of the speedboats, since he's fearless. In the past, whenever he'd been detected and chased by the Coast Guard, he simply outran them and returned to shore to try again on another night. The Coast Guard not having boats that can overtake a Cigarette. So he may look like a Jewish banker, but he obviously has nerves of steel.

Bernie and I are interested in finding new buyers for our cocaine, people not associated with Toronto and our past drug exploits. Since Henry has connections all over the country, we ask him for the names of any potential contacts.

Henry says all his people deal in pot, not cocaine. But he'll make a few calls and see if he can come up with anyone.

So Bernie and I decide to spend a little time being tourists in Key West as we wait to hear from Henry. It doesn't take long. In three days, Henry calls us to say he's got the name of someone in Milwaukie, the proverbial friend of a friend, who has a market for cocaine. Welcome news.

Early the next morning, Bernie and I drive to Miami International, drop off our rental car and catch a flight to Milwaukie, Wisconsin to check out these possible new cocaine dealers. A job interview, you could call it.

It's January. Key West in January is quite comfortable. Wisconsin? – Not so much. We don't have any warm clothing, but we figure we won't be outside much. And it's a good thing. We thought Toronto was cold in the winter. But Toronto's downright tropical, compared to Wisconsin. The temperature outside is 40 below zero.

Our new contacts, Nina Kuper and her boyfriend, pick us up at the airport and take us to a warm hotel to stay. Not a frigid moment too soon.

Her last name, Kuper, is pronounced the same as mine. Her ancestry is most likely Russian, the same as my father's family. My grandfather's surname was also originally spelled with a "K," but it was changed for him to "Cooper" when he entered Canada in 1929.

Bernie and I are comfortable with them right from the start. They're down-to- earth people and don't give us any reason to be nervous about dealing with them.

After a couple of days getting acquainted, we catch

a flight to Toronto to figure out how to get the cocaine down to them. We stay in hotels, only communicating with one person – the Peruvian Canadian customs agent who was responsible for clearing Arturo and his girlfriend through Canadian customs with their dog cage floor full of cocaine.

It seems the agent has an uncle who assures us he can cut out the spare tire of our Hertz rental car and hide the cocaine inside the inner tube so it'll never be detected.

Bernie and I go to my mother's house in the middle of the night. We see no suspicious vehicles, so I dash in and snatch the box that had been delivered to Aardvark Enterprises a few weeks earlier.

We don't waste any time. The agent's uncle easily conceals the cocaine in the spare tire, and we hit the road.

We cross the border at Niagara Falls, New York, and aren't even asked for a passport, a birth certificate or a driver's license. Back then, a Canadian crossing into the U.S. was like a visit from a favorite cousin. No suspicion. No grilling. No intimidation. Those days are gone forever.

I do all the driving while Bernie snorts his brains out. It's a nice trip.

Nina is waiting for us at the Milwaukee city limits and escorts us to a hotel that's close to her house.

After talking more with Nina, we discover her real passion is fireworks. She wants to earn enough money selling our cocaine to pay for special training in the art of fireworks displays in New Mexico. Not exactly the first thing that springs to mind when you think of professions. But neither is drug smuggling.

This is ideal. We'll no longer have to work with street dealers, who can be unreliable and dangerously indiscreet. In fact, we're so pleased and comfortable with the whole arrangement that we decide to head back down to sunny Florida, and away from chilly Wisconsin.

The plan is that while we're relaxing and enjoying the sun and surf, Nina will sell the cocaine. Every few weeks, I'll fly back up to Milwaukee, pick up the cash and deliver it back to Bernie in Florida, who'll wire it to his mother in Toronto for safekeeping. What a life! At least, it is for a while.

Bernie and I discover that we can only sit in the sun, walk on the beach, dine in the nice restaurants and ogle the bikini-clad girls for so long. After all, ours hasn't been a sedentary lifestyle. Soon, we begin to get bored. So we phone Henry in Vero Beach to see if we can come visit.

He says, “Sure. Come on up.” We rent a car and head up to see him.

Henry’s working out of a huge private house, situated at the end of a cul-de-sac, which the organization is renting for $10,000 per month. To think about it, this is around 1975 and that amount of money for a house rental is unbelievable.

That just shows how good the economy must’ve been back then compared to now. And also shows how the greed and corruption of government and corporations has failed the middle class miserably.

The use of the word “organization” is appropriate. There are about 30 guys staying in this $10,000 rented house, and all of them waiting for word that a mothership has arrived. Some of these men have been assigned to trucks for loading and driving the weed to different locations in the U.S.

Others maintain contact with the fishermen who have boats ready to go out and bring the marijuana back to the dock at the rear of the house. Everybody’s got a specific job to do in the overall operation. It is definitely an organization.

The mother ship transports six tons of grass at a time. The much smaller Cigarette boats can only handle a few bales at a time. While a fishing boat can handle even more. So it’s a huge undertaking

that lasts for hours under the cover of darkness. Maybe even for days before the boat is fully unloaded.

The people in this place are quite different from what I'm used to. They're all colourful characters, right out of a Cheech and Chong movie. There's a guy from the mountains of Colorado who says everybody walks around in his town with guns strapped to their waists. Another is a gigantic man named Tiny from the hills of Tennessee, who looks as if he could crush you like a bug but is gentle as a lamb.

They're mostly calm, easygoing and non-threatening. Sort of what you'd expect from laidback pot smokers, and not anything like the jittery, thieving, paranoid cocaine freaks I usually deal with. In fact, there doesn't seem to be a Pushey brother among them.

One of Henry's many jobs was to get enough money to finance the loads from Colombia to the American waters. Which included paying the Colombian ship owners as well as providing the funds for personnel, bribes etc. He was like a fundraiser of sorts, but not for a political party.

How a Toronto boy got involved with pot smugglers in Florida, I have no idea. Except he does have a gift of the gab, and that can take you almost anywhere.

The actual pot is fronted by big Colombian dealers, the kind who I assume shouldn't be double crossed. But once the load is ashore, the leaders of this local Florida group are responsible for payment.

Six tons of pot is worth millions, most of which gets split up by the top brass in Miami. But the guys here in Vero Beach will certainly see some nice compensation for their efforts.

Henry explains the setup to us, and then, knowing that Bernie is the money man of our duo, begins trying to persuade him to invest in the operation. It doesn't take much convincing. Bernie's obviously intrigued with the idea of experiencing the world of Florida pot smuggling.

Bernie and I book a room at a nearby hotel, since he's not yet committed any cash to the marijuana operation. Besides, he prefers to stay removed from the center of the action. If for no other reason, he's got just enough cocaine left for the two of us in Florida. If the pot smugglers got wind of it, it'd be gone in an hour.

We discuss Henry's weed smuggling opportunity, and Bernie decides to invest ten grand. We call Henry to inform him. He arrives almost immediately to collect the money and go over the details of the operation.

At that point, I guess you could say Bernie and I were going to pot.

I have a van, which is a plus for them. The pot smugglers are always looking for more people to transport the stuff to various cities around the country.

The cocaine contact Henry had set us up with – Nina in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – also has connections for selling pot. So I can take a load to her when it comes in. Henry recommends me to the necessary people in his organization, and – Bingo! – I'm hired.

We drive to the mansion HQ to meet our new associates and get set up to help out for the upcoming weeks. It's like a new job orientation.

On the top floor of the house is a guy glued to a two-way radio. He is the communications link to the smuggling bosses in Miami, the incoming mother ship and the fishermen who are on call 24/7.

I'm told I'll be living at the house until further notice. I suppose this is because word can come at any moment that the operation is a "go." Bernie, however, gets to remain at the hotel, since he's an investor.

As I wait, I hear lots of stories, most very entertaining, but some quite worrisome. For

example, it seems that these same Colombians sent out a mother ship a month ago, and it was forced to dump the entire load somewhere in the Caribbean Sea, and then go back for another. Forced to dump six tons of pot – that sounds like maybe cops were bearing down on them? That's the worrisome part.

But apparently this is a normal practice for these large scale operations. In fact, they can lose up to three loads before one gets through. The value of one successfully smuggled six-ton load easily makes up for any prior losses.

It's a huge business. An aerial view of the coast of Colombia will reveal dozens of freighters – mother boats – all waiting their turn to dock and commence loading the bales of marijuana that have been brought down the mountains loaded on donkeys.

Today, there are no more donkeys. Instead, sophisticated grain elevators and pipelines wind down through the lush mountain greenery to the coast. It's all in plain sight. There may be a War on Drugs, but the coast of Colombia seems to be a demilitarized zone.

The longer I'm at the mansion HQ the more nervous I become. Nobody seems to know anything except the bosses down south in Miami. And they ain't talking.

As with organizations everywhere, as time passes uneventfully, there's more and more gossiping and grumbling among the workforce.

The one thing that helps is that we stay fairly busy, with planning and stockpiling supplies like marine GPS units and other necessary items of communications.

Then odd things begin to happen.

From the backyard we can see the Intracoastal Waterway. One day, we notice a small boat with two guys in it, rowing around the vicinity of our compound. The old sixth sense fires up.

Next, two older people come to the front door to try and sell us some frozen meat. We're at the end of a long cul-de-sac. Why would two senior citizens go to all the trouble of making their way in the noontime heat to our place? I permit myself a little free association – frozen meat … steak … stakeout.

Also, when we go out on our daily chores, I begin seeing the same cars over and over again. The sixth sense is firing on all cylinders now. We're definitely being watched. And my coworkers are beginning to realize it too.

I'm allergic to cops. I'm ready for this whole operation to be called off. But these macho

American smugglers aren't having any of that. I can tell they plan on going through with the deal no matter what. The stakes are too high for them to back out now.

Even though these pot smugglers have a whole different mentality from the cocaine crazies in Toronto, they scare me almost as much. They're both willing to sacrifice personal safety for a big score.

No matter what you're smuggling – heroin or hard boiled eggs – there's going to be dangers involved. And with danger comes anxiety. Sometimes I wonder how long I can keep this up.

But at least there is a chain-of-command here, which is slightly reassuring. I suspect that Henry and some of the other higher-ups in our mansion HQ overhear these suspicions and convey the info to the top brass in Miami.

One day, as I'm roaming the house, I see some activity in the radio room and hear a voice saying, "We're loaded up with lobster and heading in." Its 3:00 in the morning, and the bad day I began this book with is about to begin.

Before I can ask what's going on, orders are being shouted throughout the house as well as outside that we're to assemble in the main room in ten minutes.

Once there, we're told, "Get your trucks in line and be at the ready." We're stunned. You could have heard a firing pin drop.

Part of our military-style planning was how we would unload the boats as they arrived. The drill included the order in which each of us drivers would pick up our bales for distribution.

Of course, it would all be under the cover of darkness. And speed was essential. As we drivers are getting our trucks started, other guys are making the dock ready to receive the first boat. I'm third in line, right behind the guy from Colorado.

When we hear the sounds of a boat's diesel engine slowly docking, the first truck leaves our lineup and backs into place. Something is thrown into his vehicle, and he takes off. Then the Colorado guy backs into position, and the same thing happens.

I'm next. Someone opens my van and tosses in what appears to be a large sack of ice. What is this – black market ice? I know Florida can get really hot, but I didn't think ice was being rationed yet.

Once five of us are loaded, we're told to drive around for a while and then head back. I figure it must be some sort of practice run. Fine by me. At least nothing bad can happen if we're toting bags of ice. Wrong again.

This is when all hell breaks loose.

Before we can get halfway down the long driveway the area is blasted with flood lights. A dozen vehicles carrying the Florida State Patrol, local police forces and some DEA-types in plain clothes swoop down on us. I even see a couple of Army jeeps with camo dressed soldiers hanging off the sides with grenades.

All five of us drivers are yanked from our vehicles by cops armed with machine guns, and slammed to the ground. Obviously, they take ice smuggling seriously in Florida.

Then a bullhorn announces that this is a bust. What a surprise.

Next, a local cop, the previously mentioned Officer Barbrady, decides that since this area of Florida is under his jurisdiction, he's in charge of the investigation. He's a little hard to describe, but to call him an out-of-control, psychotic idiot would be flattery.

And apparently it's Take Your Child to Work Day here in Vero Beach, Florida. Because he has his five-year-old boy with him. On what was supposed to be a major drug bust of a smuggling operation run by a gang of supposedly dangerous criminals. Most parents don't want their five-year-olds to even be

awake at 3:00 a.m., much less participating in a drug bust. But not this goon.

All the while, Officer Barbrady bellows profanities at us nonstop, calling us the most god-awful names he can think of. And he jams his pistol to our heads and threatens to kill us if we try anything stupid. With his kid standing by. What a role model!

Then he notices that the DEA guys are off to the side, gathered together and talking intensely. He hands his gun to his five-year-old and tells him to shoot us if we so much as move. This kid's going to spend decades on some shrink's couch just because of this one morning in Vero Beach alone. Either that or he'll become as insane as his old man.

Officer Barbrady joins the DEA guys, who, I'm sure, are telling him that not only are the vehicles only carrying ice, but that they've searched the house and the grounds, and there's not a milligram of pot to be found.

If Officer Barbrady was mad before, he's going to be enraged now.

At first, I thought that since this is America, as long as no one makes a run for it, we should come out alive. But this guy is so furious that there's nothing to charge us with, I'm suddenly thankful that the Florida State Patrol and the DEA are here.

If Officer Barbrady and his five-year-old gun-toting deputy were here without all these other law enforcement agencies around, he'd probably leave his son in charge, then go fetch some drugs from the station lockup to bring back and frame us with. Or worse.

The absolute last thing he wants to do is let us get off scot-free. He finally ends up arresting us for trespassing because Henry can't come up with a signed lease. We're all taken down to the police station, finger printed, booked and locked in a jail cell.

They put Henry in a cell by himself because he's the only one articulate enough to do the talking. The rest of us are tossed together into a single large cell.

We may not be able to see what's going on in Henry's cell, but we can hear it loud and clear. Officer Barbrady is shrieking at him, "The next time we meet, I won't just put you in the jail. I'll put you under the fucken jail, you little piece of shit!" Ah, Florida – the Sunshine State.

The only one who can bail us out is Bernie, since he wasn't at the house and he still has money. Of course he doesn't want to show his face at the police station, so he pays a bail bondsman about $500 to come bail us out.

We're given a court date to answer to the trespassing charges, and released. We all know immediately what our next move has to be – breakfast at Denny's.

Once things calmed down it became obvious that the Miami kingpins had been listening to our feedback the whole time and had decided to do a test run to flush out the cops. Without any of us knowing, they alerted the radio tower that the operation was a "go", with one slight exception. Use bags of ice instead of bales of pot.

Even though I think it was a foolish mistake getting involved with these people, I'm thankful the Miami bosses had the wherewithal to pay attention to our concerns and help us avoid a major drug bust.

After breakfast, Bernie and I go back to the hotel to pack up and head to Wisconsin so we can collect the remainder of the cocaine money from Nina Kuper.

The phone rings. It's Henry asking us to come to a meeting before we leave town. We tell him there's really nothing to talk about, that we plan to take our losses and stick to the kind of drug smuggling we know best – cocaine.

But he begs us, "Please, before you make your final decision, come talk to us."

What could they possibly want to discuss after all that's happened? A company car? Their corporate life insurance plan? But Bernie and I figure it can't hurt to hear what they have to say. Maybe it'll give us a glimpse into what it takes to run an organization like theirs.

We're escorted to a hotel to meet someone who we've never laid on eyes before. He appears to be a bigger shot than Henry, most likely a spokesman for the brass in Miami who are running the show.

This guy starts off by telling us we have nothing to worry about and that whatever we decide is fine with them. This is good news. I was halfway expecting some kind of veiled threat if we opted out. He says that they'd like us to stay on and help them continue the operation. It seems that many of their people had been scared off by the bust and are heading home.

I thought, "Well, yeah. What else would a rational human being do?" I know, I know – a peculiar reaction from a Bolivian cocaine smuggler like me. But in my defense – I never said I was rational.

He tells us they anticipate moving the operation to the Gulf side of Florida, near Cocoa Beach, and have the mother ship rerouted to that new rendezvous point. I'm kind of impressed … in spite of myself. These people are relentless.

You have to dump six tons of weed in the ocean? No big deal.

You're targeted for a big time drug bust? So what?

You lose most of your personnel because they're thrown in jail for trespassing? No problem.

You just get back up, dust yourself off and schedule the next mothership.

But for Bernie and me, it's thanks, but no thanks. As politely as possible, we decline the invitation. We figure that since we (i.e. Bernie) lost 10,000 bucks because of their operation, they'll be fairly understanding about our wanting to take off. And they are.

We excuse ourselves with promises of possible future cooperation and then head on back to our own business up north.

Looking back, the whole experience was quite an eye-opener. And one thing I realized was that these guys weren't a ruthless gang of drug dealers. Not at all. They were just a bunch of entrepreneurs trying to keep their business afloat. Literally.

Something’s Fishy. And When Fishy Gets His Hooks in You, You Better Squirm

Driving back home to Toronto from the Vero Beach raid, I have two things on my mind – getting back to the cocaine business and getting back to Caroline, my British girlfriend.

She’s a few years younger than me and much focused on her education. But she also wants to

travel and see the world.

Soon we're sharing a cozy apartment in the Forest Hills area of Toronto. And it's not long after that that I start putting on weight. That's because for weeks on end, I'm wolfing down a fabulous dessert she learned to prepare in England. The recipe? – fry two Mars bars and cream in a saucepan until it reaches the proper consistency and then pour that concoction over ice cream. It's a little like cocaine – you should only indulge yourself in it if you're young and your system can handle it.

Caroline loves me, but my lifestyle drives her crazy. Then finally, one time when we're staying at Bernie's posh apartment in downtown Toronto, she decides she can't take it any longer. It's a really sad day. I have to buy her a one-way ticket back to England.

What does Caroline have to do with a chapter titled "Something's Fishy. And When Fishy Gets His Hooks in You, You Better Squirm"? Well, the "Fishy" refers, of course, to Uncle Fishy. And I met Caroline because of Uncle Fishy.

More specifically, I met Caroline while I was hiding from Uncle Fishy. It was the only positive thing I ever got out of knowing him.

If you recall, Uncle Fishy was at the office of attorney Harvey Daiter when I delivered cocaine to them, prior to their snorting $4000 worth of the stuff, prior to their romp with several prostitutes. At the time, Uncle Fishy had just gotten out of the federal penitentiary. His second home.

Maybe a little background is in order:

Uncle Fishy is the brother of Harvey, the father of my first wife, Brenda. Actually, his real name is Philip, but since that almost sounds respectable, which he isn't, it was soon replaced with "Fishy," which he is.

All the men on Harvey's side of the family were gamblers. Including Harvey himself. He was the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet. He was quite respectable, with a tomato importing business that distributed to a chain of 335 stores. But he was also a compulsive gambler who lost all the family's money in card games. And he played with a rough crowd. Sometimes gangsters would come to the front door and threaten to kill his kids if he didn't pay up.

His brothers, Fishy and Eddy, were gamblers as well, but they further distinguished themselves by becoming involved in criminal activities.

Of all of Brenda's uncles, Fishy was easily the worst. Everybody in the family avoided him because he was psychotic and prone to violence, not a pleasant combination. He'll be nice and thoughtful one minute, offering you money, drugs, sex, rock and roll, even the kitchen sink if you want it. Then, the next minute, he'll snap and suddenly imagine he's been cheated by someone, who'll then have to be hunted down and made to pay for their transgression.

Plus, he colours his hair with black shoe polish.

Fishy is usually in jail. On the occasions when he's out, he lives in penthouse suites and spends much of his time gambling at the track.

I begin dealing drugs with Uncle Fishy, which besides being stupid, automatically breaks about half of my Rules of Smuggling.

Fishy starts inviting me to his penthouse suite, where there are frequently wild parties with ex-con buddies of his. Oddly enough, there aren't ever many girls at Fishy's parties. I suspect he may have a problem with the female of the species. But I'm not sure.

His place is plush. In the main room is a huge white couch that can seat five or six, next to smaller ones for three people, all surrounding a large glass table with mounds of complementary cocaine. Sort of the way most hosts would put out peanuts or pretzels.

Even when there aren't parties going on, ex-cons always seem to hang out there. It's like a safe house for them.

He wants me at his place all the time, obviously because I have such fresh, powerful cocaine. But I'm a bit of a loner and I like my space. And I especially don't want to associate with a bunch of recently released gangsters, who are probably being watched on a regular basis by the cops.

I attempt to distance myself from that scene, which infuriates Fishy to no end. Like a psychopathic patient from "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest", he

turns on me one day.

Thank God, I'm not there at the time. But he begins hunting me down. He intends to kill me.

How do I know he wants me dead? My first clue is when he goes to a concert ticket outlet in an upscale department store where Caroline is working. While a little old lady is trying to purchase ballet tickets, he begins screaming at Caroline, "Where's Hank? Where the hell is he? Tell him I'm gonna find him and kill him!" Security officers have to escort him out of the building, which only fuels his anti-Hank sentiments.

That officially ends my drug dealing with Fishy. Not only do I now have to find another customer for my cocaine, but I have to constantly be on the lookout for a crazy man with black shoe polish on his head.

My ex-mother-in-law helps me. She keeps a constant vigil on Uncle Fishy and then tells my ex-wife Brenda to pass on any significant info to me of Fishy's whereabouts. He's so potentially dangerous that if I'm in town and Brenda tells me Fishy's hot on my trail, I'll leave the city for up to a few months.

It's really rather amazing. Even though Brenda's mother is still mad at me because, as she puts it, my marriage to her daughter cost her $25,000, with 250 guests attending, and lasted only eighteen months.

Deep down – perhaps way deep down – she still likes me and doesn't want anything bad to happen to her favorite son-in-law. Correction: ex-son-in-law. Actually, we've all stayed close over the years, up to this very day.

And, of course, it doesn't hurt that Brenda's mother hates Uncle Fishy.

How long does Uncle Fishy's vendetta against me last? More than five years. It ended only because he died of a heart attack. You could have fooled me. I didn't even know he had a heart. But I guess it only makes sense that, if he does have one, the damn thing's going to attack him.

The Sleepover to Hell

While Bernie and Clarita take their extended honeymoon, Bruce and I are back from our third trip to Thailand. Each of us carrying five balls of the pure stuff. We're not back more than a week before I get antsy to get my car rust proofed at the world famous Ziebart franchise location closest to me.

When I come back from a trip with a large amount of heroin, routinely I would tend to sleep in different places for a few days at a time.

I've been staying at Brenda's apt and eating her food, paying her with free hits of heroin so she

would be happy. I told her about the appointment I was going to make for my car the next day and that the Ziebart rustproofing place was around the corner from Carol and Walter's house. Remember her older sister and her Cigarette speed boat pot smuggling Indian boyfriend Walter? They finally had to leave Florida as it was getting much too dangerous and they rented this nice big house in an Italian suburb of Toronto.

It was a beautiful warm summer night, and around ten o'clock I said to Brenda "I think I might go sleep at your sister's house so I'll be closer to Ziebart in the morning. Why don't you come too so you won't be alone, she has lots of rooms." I sure didn't anticipate the response I got from her.

She was more than adamant about me going, and she didn't want to go there herself. We would have got into a fight about it, if it wasn't so dumb. I'll make sure she has enough heroin to keep her satisfied until the next time I see her.

But she would go on and on, to the point of having bad feelings. I took it that she just wants company, and didn't want me to leave. She is going to want me to stay and keep her company because I'll disappear soon and she won't see me for another while. But there was something she was sensing that I failed to pick up.

Begrudgingly, I'm allowed to leave without giving me a major guilt trip, although she did go unnaturally overboard. I head over to sleep at Carol and Walter's house, wondering what dangers she was picking up.

Maybe I wanted to show off to Walter. I admired how he would ferry pot from the mother ship to shore with a high speed Cigarette boat. It was very stupid of me to bring one entire ball, I didn't want to break it into pieces. If I left anything at Brenda's house it wouldn't be there when I returned. The other four balls were stashed well, so I put the whole heroin ball in my pocket and drove away.

It was nice to see both of them as it was almost two years since the Florida episode that sent us all scrambling. Walt and Henry stayed behind in Florida, going wherever the pot opportunities took them. While Bernie and I carried on up north to Canada to plan future cocaine trips.

Carol and Walter are mainly pot smokers but love to partake in a nice dose of heroin whenever they get the chance, which, for them, isn't too often. We sat around enjoying all the stories we could tell each other of our different but exciting lifestyles. Around two in the morning we decide to turn in and we go to our bedrooms.

No sooner do I get under the covers and get all cozy,

I realize that I left the ball of heroin on the living room table. I lie there for a while but I know any longer I'll fall asleep and never get it until the morning. Usually when your gut is trying to tell you something, and you disregard or plain ignore it, you could be setting yourself up for disaster, as you will soon find out.

I really have to push myself to get out of the incredibly warm and comfy bed. When I do, it's cold and dark, and I make my way by holding on to the walls until I can feel the table. Then I find my ball of heroin still on the tray Carol brought out for me. I grab it and fumble my way back to bed trying desperately not to make a sound and wake anybody up.

I scrape off a tiny line from the rock hard ball, snort it, tuck myself in bed, take a big long deep breath in utter exhaustion and nod off to sleep within seconds.

About five in the morning when I am in the deepest sleep I could possibly be in, I wake up to a dream, a very bad dream.

There are men running into the house, through the front and back doors, with big guns and screaming quite loud "This is a bust, don't anybody move, stay where you are"!

God, please let it be a nightmare, like the time I got

off the plane in Peshawar, Pakistan and went straight out to eat my favourite chicken tikka before I took a nap at the hotel. I think the drastic change of food from a Western chicken to a Pakistani chicken caused me to wake up in a sitting position, sweat dripping from my brow after dreaming the most realistic nightmare I ever had. I was being eaten alive in a burned out car by future zombies in some kind of an apocalyptic world. It was so real, yet a dream.

When I open my eyes, I look up at a tall man dressed in black holding a gun an inch from my head, very menacing and yelling at the top of his lungs, “get out of the bed slowly and put on your clothes.”

This is not a nightmare at all. This is an extraordinarily serious live situation. And caught by surprise in the middle of the night in a groggy sleep state. I am thinking about that ball of 99% pure heroin I retrieved from the living room just hours before.

It’s on the bedside table right beside me and even more frightening, it’s practically right under his nose. He continues to yell, pointing the long gun at my head. I don’t really hear any of his commands at all, I’m focused on the ball of heroin. This will put me behind bars for a very long time, too long to even fathom the thought of. All I know is I have to get

that ball away from his view and I will have literally one second to do it, after which I'll be doomed.

I get up slowly as he demanded. He barks "Get your pants and shirt on and get out there with your friends," meaning the living room where Walter and Carol are already sitting. He's focused on me like a wolf in the forest eyeing me up for dinner.

I put one leg in my pants, then hop around with my back to him, while he screams at me to hurry up. I kept thinking, leave me alone for a minute, I'm trying to get that incriminating evidence away from your line of sight.

I fake losing my balance, using my hand to steady myself on the bedside table. At the same time I put my hand around the ball of heroin. I'm sure he saw me do it, he's standing right over me, not even a foot away. Any second now I'm expecting him to say, "hand over what you just scooped up from the table there buddy."

But he doesn't. I forge ahead, regardless of when he's going to call me out on it. Now I'm tucking the ball of heroin clenched in my palm, down inside my underwear. Plus that extra maneuver to make sure the ball doesn't fall through and end up rolling down my pant leg as I exit the room and walk down the hall.

I pull up my pants and latch up my belt buckle, and all he says is “Now put on your shirt and get out there”, which I gladly comply with.

I thought to myself “You mean to say you suited up with the finest tactical gear and fancy high tech weapons. After having that last minute pre drug-bust meeting at the police station. Then you burst into my room, with adrenalin flowing throughout your body, ready for anything. You then wake me out of a heavy drug induced dead sleep, and I’m able to snatch that golf ball size heroin from under your nose”? Someone needs to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, besides me.

What does it say for the training of this drug officer and the sneakiness of myself? Was he a dumbass cop, it didn’t really seem so. Or did I just outsmart him with the one stinky second I had available to me?”

How does a semi-conscious drugged up person manage to conceal a ball of white rock hard pure heroin right in front of his well-trained eyes? Did I have help, like on the mountaintop of the Bolivian and Peruvian border with Bernie confronting the cop from Argentina and the Customs Guard from Peru?

I greeted Carol and Walter in the living room. I sat down on an empty chair around the five foot square antique wooden coffee table. Carol had this to serve

her guests all the different munchies that go with smoking pot. She was such a perfect hostess, except for her incessant talking.

When the cop guarding us turned around for a second, I quickly flashed the heroin ball at Carol and Walter. Boy did they give me a look, part wonder and part, you're going to get us all put in jail for life, look.

Carol motions to me where I should stash the ball on the underside of the coffee table. There's gray carpeting around the sides of the table. In the corner, on the bottom side, there was a little pocket where the carpet was stapled. I was able to stuff the ball in so it would stay put and not fall to the floor while the cops conduct their raid.

After its tucked safely away I still had thirty seconds to spare before the cop came back in the room, never taking his eyes off any of us, for the balance of the search.

While we are all guarded by one man, the rest of them are now focusing on the basement. Where they easily find forty pounds of pot, still in the bales, fresh off the boat from Florida. "Great," I thought, at least they found something and should keep them happy enough to not look any further and possibly uncover my heroin ball.

Walter was a seasoned smuggler down in Florida with the big boys and knew how to tell the police he wants a lawyer before he says anything. We were then carted off out the door, without handcuffs I might add, to the waiting cop cars and then on to the police station for processing.

We were all separated and put into jail cells, either alone or with an undercover cop. Before I was released a straight out rat from the street was placed in the cell with me to garner whatever information, but I wouldn't say anything.

I could tell almost immediately this guy was getting noticeably irritated by my lack of speech.

I finally find out what the hell is going on and why I came so drastically close to spending a good portion of my life behind bars. While Brenda and I were arguing whether I should sleep at her apartment or drive over to her sister Carol, The Toronto Police Department, The Peel Police Department, The Ontario Provincial Police and The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, were having their last meeting after wrapping up a nine month investigation.

They were following a big pot dealer named Rosie that was given a fourteen year jail sentence and started right up the day he was released. That was nine months ago and the investigation came to an end that night.

They now have fifty two people in custody from the list living at 28 different locations. They were watching him from the day he was released. That would be the reason, I assumed, for all the various police agencies collaborating together on this huge bust.

So for some reason I decide to get my car treated to a rustproofing job. And then I decide to sleep over at Carole's house. On the very night of this highly organized bust of all those people, at all those addresses, at five o'clock on that morning.

I didn't even have the strength to phone anyone from the police station I was so disoriented. And getting sicker by the minute from heroin withdrawals. Thankfully Carol was the organized one. She made a call to Brenda to phone her lawyer and also call to Bruce and my mother to arrange a lawyer for me.

It was now Saturday morning and if I don't get out today I'll be stuck here all weekend. By then I will be in full blown withdrawals.

Walter Fox was a top criminal lawyer in Toronto. He was sitting at his downtown office which is only a block away from the courthouse, doing nothing, when he gets a hysterical phone call from my poor mother begging him to get her son out of jail.

He only knew of me and my exploits from our mutual friend Gerry Mamid who used to be a lawyer but decided it was easier running his father's pant manufacturing business instead.

When Fox arrived I see this silver haired older gentleman and I felt better already. I explained that I was just sleeping over and had nothing to do with any of the people being arrested in the bust last night. He said he'll do what he can and left as quickly as he came, leaving me behind to worry and wonder some more.

It was not too much longer and my name was called. I was escorted from the dungeon below to a courtroom above where a Judge and Walter Fox were already seated and waiting for me.

Walter had me out so fast my head was spinning like the little girl in The Exorcist. Not one other person from the fifty two people arrested were released that day. I guess I had the better lawyer.

All were remanded until Monday morning when they were paraded in front of the same judge I had. He got extremely mad for the circus, as he called it, and asked the prosecutor to split them all up.

This of course led some people to question the reason for my early release, but I didn't care what anyone thought, I knew the truth.

Bruce, knowing the process for being jailed and released, was waiting at the back door exit where the last court officer sits before signing you out. Bruce wasn't too happy with me when he saw me walk through the door. But when he found out about the ball of heroin left behind at Carol's house his sneer quickly changed to a big grin.

Carol and Walter and all the others were still in jail for the weekend so the only thing to worry about now is if the house we were going to was still being watched or not. We had a cab drop us off around the corner and I used the ravine behind the house.

I knew all about this ravine when a skunk once attacked and sprayed me down there. And I was able to make it to Carole's house where she helped me get rid of the smell. Hiding in the ravine we checked if any suspicious activity was happening anywhere on the streets of the neighbourhood.

Once we were assured that the coast was clear, we snuck up to the back of the house, at which point we gained access through an unlocked door the cops left behind. The back door leads into a lower level which was a gigantic mess, everything strewn all over the place. We make our way through the silent dark house that was so violently invaded the morning before.

Both of us are trying not to breathe, so we can hear

if any cops are lurking in the house somewhere, ready to pounce on us. But no, cops. We are okay and I proceed to the corner of the huge carpeted coffee table, reach my hand underneath and pull out the ball of heroin sitting quietly waiting for me to return.

Satisfied that the cops were not in the house or watching from afar, we sat right there and scraped off a sufficient size hit.

We were both trembling by now from some thirty plus hours of being locked away from it. I am starting to feel the relief of what could have been as big a disaster as being caught with all that cocaine on the border of Peru and Bolivia.

I was detecting a pattern now of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that's only half the equation in my view. There always has to be a balance to everything in the Universe. It almost feels like being infected with some kind of venom and having an antidote that saves you from certain death.

For me being in the "wrong place at the wrong time", facing a certain deadly fate, and having a savior of some sort, whether it comes in the form of a live human being or a spirit I can't see nor understand, making an intervention on my behalf, is the same as having an antidote for a poisonous bite.

How Not To Get Your Head Chopped Off

One day I realized the financial books for the bagel shop Diane and I owned was getting way out of hand as the months flew by so fast. So I put an ad in the local University newspaper for a student bookkeeper to help me get my books in order and to keep them like that while we concentrated on the business.

A few people came to the bakery but I didn't like any of them, too spoiled for me. Then one afternoon a young student walked in, all wrapped up in her traditional Muslim clothing so familiar to me from my many trips to Pakistan.

I could tell she was anticipating another Canadian

business owner that was going to send her away after seeing how she looked. Instead, I took a big interest and asked her to sit down and talk.

She didn't say where she came from but she did transmit a favourable impression to me and quickly I asked her to help me organize my books. We settled on a Monday when she had no classes. I gave her my address where the computer was located so she could copy some files to do the work at home on her laptop.

When she arrived at our apartment I opened the door and she walked on my Afghan carpet, which she noticed right away. "Where is this from"? She asks. "Oh you probably never heard of the place, Peshawar, it's a city in Pakistan" I tell her. "I live in Peshawar, my whole family is there right now" she says. I go nuts, and can't believe I'm meeting someone from Peshawar after almost ten years.

I find out her family comes from Nuristan, Afghanistan, which is where the last King of Afghanistan came from. Her father was a General in that King's army, and was well traveled and schooled, in a country with a six percent literacy rate. He was also chief of police in the tribal area of Pakistan after being driven out of his homeland by the Russians. We become instant friends and family.

Then after three years of Yenta's Bagels, which was

preceded by eight years of watching young girls practice how to walk in a Barbizon Modeling School, my midlife crisis kicked in with a weird vengeance I didn't see coming.

9 11

The bagel shop was rightly named Yenta's Bagels after a real Yenta, my third and final wife Diane. When that business didn't work out as expected we went to live with my dying father in Toronto.

We got there the last week in August of 2001 and less than two weeks later Diane wakes me up one morning to say "Hank wake up, a plane just hit one of the twin towers in New York."

Naturally I jumped out of bed and watched the whole thing develop. Glued to the TV in my father's basement for the next 5 weeks I watched all the developments on CNN.

It seemed like things started to calm down a bit around Xmas, but Bush woke us all up when he announced the start of the War on the Taliban in Afghanistan.

After that the word Peshawar became a household name along with Osama Bin Laden. Frantically I track down Zainab, the daughter of the General from the Afghan Army and asked if her father would

see me if I went there.

Everyone around me was adamant that I don't go. I'm sure they thought I was crazy and why wouldn't they?

I have been a solid citizen of the community now with two legal businesses under my belt. A modeling agency teaching girls how to walk and a bakery making delicious bagels and cream cheese for people.

No drugs since my son Aaron was born in 1989. I've been excitement free for all that time and to boot I'm now in a midlife crisis turning fifty.

It's now January 2002 going into four months since the towers came down. Zainab is the only one that thinks I'll be OK going to Peshawar. Because she comes from there, I'm sure. But I have also been there many times and know it like the back of my hand.

I can't stand it any longer and feel this is a chance I can't let slip by. I tell my father and son I'll be fine and buy a ticket for Peshawar, Pakistan for $1475.00 return airfare via Dubai.

The war is now raging across the border in Afghanistan with the Americans dropping bombs like crazy. All feels normal when I land in Peshawar

Airport and clear the same chaotic customs as I remembered. No orderly lines, just a huge blob of people waving their passports at the man sitting up high in a wooden booth.

I finally get through, pick up my bags and walk out to the blazing heat of the outside. Zainab's whole family was waiting behind the ropes and being the only westerner out the doors of the airport, they automatically assumed I was their man and greeted me with hugs and kisses.

Afghans are renowned the world over for their hospitality. I saw the real thing in action and can fully attest to that. I was treated like royalty and protected at all times.

But now the war in Afghanistan is in full force, the Americans bombing the crap out of The Taliban. Daniel Pearl a reporter for The New York Times was dispatched to do a story at the exact same time as when I left Toronto. Both of us heading for Pakistan.

He, supposedly, would have the resources of his world famous newspaper at his disposal, while I would have only myself. Obviously he'd hire bodyguards to go with him when he would go to interview a connection for an inside story about the Taliban.

He ended up getting kidnapped, and being Jewish,

having his throat cut open and his head cut off, live on the Internet and TV sets around the world.

In the meantime, I'm taken to the house where the family lived. The taxi pulls up to a 20 foot stone wall with a rusted old steel door big enough to allow a car through. On top of the wall was shards of glass from broken bottles embedded into the cement.

On hot evenings Khalilullah would take a cot and sleep out in the jet fume laden night air.

Their home was in an Afghan refugee camp. It was built by the Pakistan government for the many millions of Afghans who fled their homeland after the Russians invaded in 1980. And which the Americans were now bombing the living hell out of.

This particular refugee camp, where I've been taken to, was built right on the edge of one of the major runways of the Peshawar International Airport. Not only airlines like PIA (Pakistan International Airlines), Swissair, Air France etc., but also late at night and very early mornings, military jets burning huge amounts of fuel, would leave behind massive clouds of noxious fumes to hover over the camp for hours.

The family consisted of the General, Khalilullah, his current wife, four of his six kids, plus a couple of relatives whose parents have been killed by bombs

and other kinds of destruction.

And the odd stray Taliban character who comes by for a safe place to eat and sleep. The first time I came out to see a man dressed in black from the turban on his head all the way down to the ground, I almost had a fit. Jesus Christ I just saw people like that on all the news channels back home. And now one of them is right in front of me.

Khalilullah assures me that he was, indeed a Taliban soldier. He claims he is on their side because it's the only paying job he can get, and don't worry "he won't hurt you."

This Taliban man would look at me with the most hateful stare I ever saw in my life. I was getting fearful of my life, even with the assurance of the General and his oldest sons.

Eventually though, he did become relatively friendly to me. Even smiling at me on an occasion or two. I couldn't believe I was living with a Taliban person while he was on his vacation. Vacation from what, I thought, ambushing and killing people?

While I was there I asked if the General knew of someone that could give me a massage. He thought about it for a while and then announced one day that a guest was coming over the next evening and might be able to do it at that time.

Sure enough, a few guests came over to pay respects, as always, to Khalilullah and one of them was a barber and said he knew how to give massages. We agreed on a price that came out to less than half a dollar of Canadian currency.

When the massage was over, all of us, meaning the men of course, sat around and smoked some delicious tasting hashish and talked about our lives and families.

I had a stack of photos that I had brought along with me to show my Afghan second family. I brought them out and showed them to the barber and when we finished he asked me if he could have one. He chose a close up photo of me and I didn't take any further notice.

The hospitality and the hash put me in a lull, far from the feeling of paranoia, and I gave him the picture. We finished up talking and I truly had a comfortable time, not thinking anything untoward whatsoever.

A few days later I got the beginnings of dysentery. For anyone not experiencing such a thing, it starts out with basic diarrhea and progresses from there.

You can't stop shitting no matter what because your stomach is cramping up all the time. After three days my poop went from dark to light to pure clear

liquid. No solid waste at all. Only electrolytes stripping off my brain, I figured. I knew I must be real close to death as I was starting to hallucinate. And to make things worse, I had a 105 degree temperature but I didn't know that until I got to the hospital.

Khalilullah's daughter Zainab and a brother or two take me to the hospital. Upon entering I see literally hordes of shabby looking refugees seeking care, some holding babies. Being white I was taken almost immediately. I think I was expecting to be left in a corner to die.

Instead a nice Pakistani male doctor was called in to look at me. He took my temperature and said it was too high and gave me a needle in the ass immediately. I didn't even ask what it was, but he told me it was 105. He gave me a prescription for Cipro and other pills and said to get some rest in a safe clean place.

After the hospital visit I decided to take his advice and go stay at the Pearl Continental Hotel, which is as safe and clean as you can get in Peshawar.

There I could recuperate and eat food made for international travelers. Instead of sharing dishes of rice handled by everyone's hands, washed or not. I'm sure the germs on the hands of the Taliban man was what attacked and almost destroyed my immune

system. But who knows. One thing for sure they have some powerful germs over there.

Very slowly, day by day I got a little bit stronger and after about ten days I had the strength to go out and begin the struggle of getting out of the country.

It took thirteen days in total, but I got out and now I was home all cozy with Diane in Toronto. My father and son were happy too once again. I made it home safely as I always did in the 70’s and 80’s.

Aaron lived with his mother and I would pick him up and have him sleep at our house on the weekends. So the next weekend after I returned from Pakistan I went to pick him up and brought him over.

Once he was all set up with his favourite game and I could see that he’s nice and comfortable, I open up my computer and begin to check my email.

I see a new email that had just come in a few hours before from Zainab, daughter of the General Khalilullah. She stayed behind with the family after I left the country.

As I read it out aloud, I could see poor little Aaron’s thirteen year old face react with honest to goodness fear as he realized how close I came to getting kidnapped and probably having my head cut off.

Better than me trying to explain what happened that night I will use the words straight from the horse's mouth, the email written within two hours after the attack. I decided not to use the family's last name. Khalilullah has since died but members of his family are still inside Afghanistan and could be in danger as a result. Please be aware English is not his birth tongue but is completely understandable. Thank you.

A Never Heard Cry of Mr. Khalilullah N

This is to bring into your kind notice the current situation and the sufferings of the Nxxxxxxi family and the act of extreme truculence upon them.

It was the 20th of May, 2002, time; 2:30 A.M. I was sleeping in the terrace, as it was too hot inside plus we had the power cut off. Suddenly I felt a gun placed right on my head and I heard a voice ordering me to wake up. As soon as I opened my eyes, I saw a masked man pointing a huge Kalashnikov (AK47) right toward my head. I tried to offer some kind of resistance by trying to snatch the

Kalashnikov away from that person and I would surely have succeeded in doing so had it not been for the other man hitting me on the nose with the back side of the Kalashnikov and breaking my nose bone, two teeth and injuring my eyes, and the family was tortured with Kalashnikovs.

Not realizing the pain, I still tried to fight them back until I heard the cry of my younger son asking me to put a halt to my actions as they had my family as hostage inside. Knowing how helpless I was, I eased my hold on the Kalashnikov.

I was constantly being asked for my Canadian friend, Hank Cooper, and the Canadian girl, as they pronounced it, my daughter.

Everybody was helpless. Nobody could have done anything as there were 7 people, 3 with Kalashnikovs, 2 with 32 bored guns, 2 of them with huge staggers, and 4 people were waiting outside in the car.

They were constantly asking for Hank Cooper and my daughter. They wanted to kidnap all the western-country-nationality holders to possess some amount of money promised by Al-Qaeda on bring any foreigner dead or alive. We told them that they had left long ago, they demanded my younger daughter as a ransom for Hank and Zainab (my daughter). Upon hearing this, my two sons raised and avoided

them of doing so. My nephew was hit twice on the back with Kalashnikov and when his activeness didn't lose consciousness they sprayed chloroform on him and he fainted right on the spot.

They scanned the whole house for precious stuff. The room was like a hell. It was so messy that it was proving hard to place a foot down.

It was 4:00 A.M., they had stayed at our house for almost one and a half hours now. The fear of dawn and the waking up of the villagers scared them off, and in a rush they ended up looting 2 to 3 million-rupees-worth of my coin collection.

Afghan jewelry collection, stagger collection, mineral stone collections, gem stones and some decoration pieces, video camera, gold chain, watches, underground beads, pearls, personal photo albums, my ID card, Rs-35,000 in a case, my daughter's hand bag which had her personal documents and ID card etc. and 4 Indian sculptures which were about 600 to 1,000-year-old.

The whole action was so perfectly scrutinized that no-one had any chance whatsoever to fight back. The only thing that we could have done at that time was to have prayed to God for my and the family's safety.

They escaped through the gate saying that they

would be back for the Canadian guy Hank Cooper and my daughter and my family.

After all this we called the police. The police arrived at 5:00 A.M. The police investigated if we had any such suspect. Of all the people that I could think of knowing that Hank and my daughter had arrived from Canada, Baryaley, a barber near our house was the prime suspect for me and my family as he was the only one who entered our house when Hank was here.

Police chased Baryaley and arrested him. On torturing him, he, Baryaley, confessed of being guilty of the crime. He named all his fellows who were involved in the crime with him. Police arrested 4 of the named criminals and all four of them confessed to their crimes. Although the Police was successful in apprehending the named criminals, the head of the gang, the person who had gotten away with the jewelleries and stuff was still on the loose.

What I believe is that the people captured by police are very low classed members of the highly intricate gang. The mastermind behind all this is hiding somewhere. The criminals are in the captives in Thana Pishtakhara, but "the two" who had taken all the stuff with them are still on the loose. As the police was on the chase for the 2 members, they brought their mothers and wives to the police

station so that they hand themselves over to them.

It's not that I doubt the gallant efforts of the S.H.O, who has been extremely helpful throughout. But from the past, Pakistani police reputation to keep this in the back of his mind that the captives could release themselves by bribing one or two of the officials which would be another disaster to my life.

They had been torturing my family (kids and women) with Kalashnikovs asking them of the American people, as they think of every foreigner to be an American. They looted the house when they couldn't find Hank and Zainab.

It is a major security issue for me and my family members as I don’t have anyone other than God to protect my family. What I believe is that these people were not members of the Al-Qaeda network themselves but were being paid for performing an assignment of kidnapping the foreigners and taking them to the Al-Qaeda network and I presume that the family members of these people are still on the loose performing many precarious activities.

The stuff that they have looted is not an effort of one day but the inheritance of my father and the arduous jobs that I have performed in the past to earn every single penny of it legally.

I am afraid that this could not be the last that I

would see of these people; they will be back in different form to kill or kidnap me and my children for money.

My life here is in danger, if something happens to me or to my family, the international community such as the U.N, and Pakistani police officials will be responsible of it, because all of you with all your great resources cannot save our family, I doubt you can be helpful to anyone.

It is better, in that case to change your motives and rename your organization and tell everyone that you can't help them in any way, then to making fools out of them. Since 1993, I have been crying for help from international community but didn't receive any attention.

I hope and pray that my voice will be heard this time by international community otherwise I will believe that there is no one who can really listen to a man who based his life on love, peace and humanity.

End of the letter. No agency ever helped him. Even Canada ended up denying his application for refugee status due to him fighting the Russians years earlier.

Epilogue

It’s 1994, and I’m clean. After fifteen years of drug smuggling – eight cocaine years with Bernie, ten heroin years, half with Bruce and then just me on my own for the balance of those years.

When it was all over, I had one question – “How the hell did I make it out alive?”

There were always dangers. But those years of heroin smuggling were particularly unnerving. I made over thirty heroin trips alone, about one every three months, and each were anxiety ridden in one way or another.

One day I’m eating breakfast at the Greens Hotel in Peshawar, facing a large window that looks out on the street in front of the hotel. Suddenly, a large army truck pulls up, and about 20 armed troops jump out and dash toward the hotel.

Paranoia being my normal state, my blood runs cold. Here I am, a white guy on a heroin buying trip, in a city where everyone knows that any white guy is probably here on a heroin buying trip. I brace

myself.

The military men burst into the hotel, guns at the ready. Thankfully they don't enter the restaurant, so I finish my porridge with a minimum of indigestion.

After they leave, I ask the young man at the front counter "what's going on." He tells me that two unmarried people were in the hotel, and the army was sent to arrest them. They'll most likely end up in some primitive Pakistani prison, never to be seen or heard from again.

When the Beatles sang, "All you need is love," they obviously weren't thinking of Peshawar. If you can get tossed into a dungeon for premarital sex, what chance does a smuggler have? I'm reminded once again how risky my occupation is.

There are other dangers. Ever since the Russians invaded Afghanistan in 1980, bombs continually go off in the city. I would read about them in the morning paper over breakfast in the Greens Hotel where I think I'm fairly safe, especially since there's a British Airways office on the ground floor.

Safe? Who am I kidding? Nothing's really safe in Afghanistan and Pakistan. On my next trip, I find it's been blown to smithereens.

Not long after that, a suicide bomber strolls into the

PIA (Pakistan International Airways) guarded compound, where I often went to book a flight back to the civilized world, detonates himself and everything else in the vicinity. I missed that one by a couple of weeks.

Two of my often used airlines to get from Canada to Peshawar was Kuwait Airlines and PIA. A couple examples of tragedies I missed by mere days; March 2, 1981: Pakistan International Airlines' flight PK-326 began as a routine domestic trip from Karachi to Peshawar. In midair three heavily armed men seized the plane, diverted it to Kabul, Afghanistan, and demanded the release of 92 "political prisoners" from the Pakistani jails.

My main cheap connection to Peshawar was Kuwait Airways Flight 221. On its way from Kuwait to Pakistan in December of 1984 was hijacked and diverted to Tehran. The hijackers demanded the release of the Kuwait 17. When the demand wasn't met, the hijackers killed two American officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

I finally begin staying at the heavily fortified Pearl-Continental Hotel. It has a long driveway and a small army of heavily armed guards. Until I "retired" from smuggling in 1989, I was safe there.

But, as I mentioned, nothing's really safe in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pearl-Continental

Hotel was totally destroyed in 2005 when a large fertilizer filled truck bomb smashed through the perimeter and rammed into the building.

Because the dangers seemed to escalate and I was now without the calming influence of Bernie, I had become increasingly nervous about what I was doing. The only way I could cope was to take unbelievably large doses of heroin, just to keep my anxiety at bay.

Which, of course, created another problem – if I'm so high on heroin, how the hell am I going to pass through the heavy checkpoints leaving Peshawar, the Heroin Capital of the World. And then make it through Karachi and all the other stopovers, without getting caught.

Plus, all along the way, I had to keep darting into the nearest bathrooms to inject my dose. What a "Catch 22" – I needed to stay high to deal with the anxiety, and I needed to be straight to deal with the customs agents. Obviously, staying high won out.

It was ironic. In my condition, I couldn't have kept a job as a janitor, and yet here I was, flying all over creation, buying smuggling and selling cocaine and heroin.

And dealing with Canada Customs agents as well as future Taliban drug lords in the tribal areas of

Pakistan. And making lots of money at it.

Many of my drug contacts are no longer around. Most people, who started smuggling when I did, were long dead or rotting in prison. Three trips was usually the limit before they ended up in either a cell or a casket.

Between the mortality rate and the sheer improbability of first getting off heroin and then getting off methadone, I'm not sure how I got out of drug smuggling alive and free.

I don't think I'm smart enough or lucky enough to avoid capture for fifteen years. At first, I thought my charmed life might have been the result of my close association with the enigmatic Bernie. But then he died. So how do I account for it?

It seemed as if there had to be something else, some other factor at work. Did I have some invisible guardian who kept me safe against all odds and through the most impossible of circumstances?

And that brings up an even more intriguing question – "Why me?"

I was obsessed about this for quite a while. Over the last few years, I've started developing a theory. A rather unusual one.

It begins back in 1989 when my son, Aaron, is nine days old. The three of us pack up and move to Vancouver to open a Barbizon modeling school franchise. The house I pick is cozy and close to our office. But when Marie sees it, she pitches a fit.

She doesn't care about convenience. She wants a large fancy house, complete with hard marble floors and big walk-in closets.

We argue about this for about three months, till one of us finally gives in. Me. We move to a large luxurious house.

That does the trick for a while. But we don't stay there long. In fact, over the next four years, for one reason or another, we move from one big ornate house to another. The last one being a five acre property with an indoor pool and three horses living in the backyard.

Then, one day, I'm driving to our office and go by that first older home we had that Marie hated. There's a "For Rent" sign in the yard. I notice the owner standing at her front window. I ring the doorbell. When she lets me in, I tell her I want the house back.

She knows why we originally left. "What about Marie?" she asks.

“I’ll take care of that,” I reply with false bravado.

So I immediately begin trying to figure out how to get back in that house again without having to tell Marie in advance.

We frequently go out of town selling modeling programs. So, I arrange for Marie and the sales team to go on a road trip at the end of the month.

While she’s gone, I have movers come in and transfer everything to the house I’ve just rented. When she gets back on Sunday night, she gets a real surprise. The look on her face is priceless. Scary as hell, but priceless.

She still dislikes the house, but Aaron is five now and attending school. Plus the office is only three blocks away. She reluctantly concedes to the logic of the situation.

In Vancouver, most neighbourhoods are built with nice cozy lane-ways between the backyards, sort of like an upscale alley. There aren’t too many Jews in this part of Vancouver. Most of them live on the other side of the city. But that’s okay. I never liked living around them anyway. I’m happy here.

The garage is set in the rear of the backyard, next to the lane-way. I can tell it’s going to be a nice retreat for me.

Unpacking, I come across an Israeli flag that I brought home when I was living in the kibbutz fifteen years earlier. I decide to put it to use.

My next door neighbor is a real handyman, the kind who can build a go-kart for his son, create ambitious woodworking projects and repair anything. He tells me he'll help me install a flagpole. He even has the perfect pole lying in his yard, doing nothing.

We buy cement, dig the hole, erect the pole and then let the cement cure overnight.

The next day, I hoist the flag.

For me, this is really atypical. I normally keep a low profile, stemming partly, no doubt, from my former profession. But maybe this is a way to announce that my smuggling days are over and that I'm now a respectable member of a community, even if it's the Jewish community on the other side of town.

Soon I meet another neighbor, Diane, who lives on the opposite side of the lane, and whose backyard faces mine. One morning, she comes out on her deck and sees my Israeli flag. She's absolutely shocked.

It seems that while Marie, Aaron and I were house-hopping around Vancouver for the last four years, a large family had moved into the house we're now living in. That new family and Diane's family – she,

her husband of 24 years and two kids – quickly became friends.

One day, while Diane's outside enjoying a beautiful day, the man, named Toth, who's living in our house, crosses the lane to visit with her.

All of a sudden, out-of-the-blue, he growls, "Hitler should have killed all the Jews."

Diane's dumbfounded. She finally replies, "I'm a Jew."

He stares at her a moment, and then stomps back across the lane to his yard. He never speaks to her again.

Toth owns a large truck and always pulls it into a section of Diane's property so he can maneuver into the parking space at his house.

After his anti-Semitic comment, she now waits for him every day when he comes home from work. She stands on her property, the area where he used to drive up on, and blocks his way. He pulls up within an inch of her, but always stops – reluctantly – just short of hitting her. In his mind wishing he could kill that Jewish bitch.

One day, after this goes on a while, Toth packs up his family and moves to another city, far away from

Vancouver. Evidently, he hates Jews so much that he can't bear the idea of a Jewish woman living next door. I suppose that since this isn't Nazi Germany and he can't have her killed, he has no recourse but to leave town.

He'd just moved out when I drove by the house that day, spotted the "For Rent" sign on the front lawn and immediately signed a lease for it.

The weird thing is that I hadn't driven by that house once in the past four years because my work route didn't go through that part of the city.

But I was fresh off methadone and heroin after 14 years, and was looking for some herbal remedies that might help me cope with the after effects of my addiction, which was mainly insomnia. I hadn't had a good night's sleep for the past nine months.

On that day I was coming back from a vitamin store and impulsively decided to drive by the old house, just to have a look. The "For Rent" sign had just been put up.

My family and Diane's family become friends and frequently have dinner together. Both sets of kids got along great, and Diane's husband, David, and I become best buddies. We even have the same taste in music.

Diane and I are Jewish, while David is British and Marie is Italian. This Jewish connection gradually makes our friendship closer, but not in a sexual or flirty way. She's much too proper a lady for that. At night, we often take walks or sit outside, usually just the two of us out of boredom, since our spouses go to bed earlier than we do.

Then one day after about a year, I ask her if she'd like to fly to Los Angeles and then drive down to Tijuana to see the hospital where I had my successful treatment for heroin addiction. Just the two of us. As unlikely as it may seem, I have no hidden agenda.

Her husband obviously realizes that the invitation is perfectly innocent and Okays it. But I know Marie will go crazy and say no. So I decide to organize, yet again, a road trip for her, this time for a week to Ottawa and Montreal to do some talent scouting.

After arranging that trip, I'll set up flights for Diane and myself to fly to Los Angeles. Sneaky and dishonest, I know. But I rationalize that I have no ulterior motive. And also, for some strange reason, I feel almost compelled to go through with it.

When I get on the phone to make reservations for Marie in Ottawa, I run into a dilemma. There's a convention in town, and no acceptable hotels are available. By "acceptable," I mean a large classy

hotel like a Sheraton or a Hilton, the kind that Marie expects.

So I book her into the closest motel I can find that has a room available. Over the following week, she and the man on duty at the motel develop a relationship. A romantic one. In fact, he ends up moving lock, stock and barrel to Vancouver to be with her, even while Marie and I are still married. Eventually, they get married.

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, I have no idea any of this is about to unfold.

Diane and I land in Los Angeles and head for a Hollywood restaurant for a nice dinner. We order two Grand Marnier drinks, and then, totally unexpected, after a moment of gazing into each other's eyes, we kiss. We don't stop until the restaurant is about to close and we're told to leave.

It takes us completely by surprise. Prior to this impetuous moment, the two of us had never thought of each other as anything but good friends.

It's a hell of a week. By the time it's over, all of our lives will have been unbelievably impacted. As a result of those seven days, Marie and I will get a divorce, Diane and David will get a divorce, Marie and I will shut down our modeling school, Marie and the Ottawa guy will get married, and Diane and I

will get married and then move to the other side of the country, opening a bagel business in Halifax, Nova Scotia. All of this in less than six months.

How did it all begin? – With me driving past that old house for the first time in four years and seeing a “For Rent” sign that had just been put out in the front yard. House vacated by white supremacist Jew haters.

And how did that begin? – With me going through heroin addiction and then methadone treatments, to the point where I needed to find an herbal medicine just to be able to sleep.

And how did that begin? – With me being a drug smuggler.

And where did that begin? – With Bernie.

Haruki Murakami, a Japanese writer, wrote in Kafka on the Shore, “Even chance meetings are the result of karma… Things in life are fated by our previous lives. That even in the smallest events there’s no such thing as coincidence.”

There was a time when I would have been willing to chalk up all these events in my life to coincidence. But I’m reconsidering.

Flash forward eighteen years. My wife Diane is

taking a walk in town and sees that the old synagogue's front door is open. She's got a little extra time, so she asks her cousin to let her inside the now closed synagogue that she used to attend with her family.

It was built in 1906 and is one of the earliest Jewish prayer houses in Canada.

On the walls of synagogues worldwide are plaques of early members of the congregation. Her family's immigration to Canada dates back to the 1880s. This is quite early for Jewish immigration, so she's interested to see if they're represented on the walls of this old synagogue. The plaque she's looking for is one for the patriarch of the Cape Breton Cohen family – Shalom Cohen.

His gravestone only has the year of his death – 1951. But the plaque she finds is more precise – June 26, 1951. She sends me an email with the photo of the plaque and a three word message, "Look at this!"

June 26, 1951 – the exact same day I was born.

A coincidence? Only if there are such things as coincidences.

Shalom Cohen came from Russia in 1895 to Cape Breton, Canada, a tiny island off the Nova Scotia mainland. He settled there and started a family.

It ended up being a good-sized family – four sons and two daughters. When he died, he left all his money to one child, George, because the rest of his brood were already wealthy and self-sufficient.

George, Diane's grandfather, then had a large family of his own. When he died, he left all his money to one child, Philip, because he believed his other children didn't deserve any of it.

Philip's brothers and sisters fought over that inheritance, handed down from Shalom to George to Philip. But, in the end, Philip won out. And when Philip died, he bequeathed everything to his only daughter, Diane. My wife Diane.

Besides the day of my birth coinciding with the day of Shalom Cohen's death, there were other factors that struck me as unusual.

You can see where this is going.

Sometimes it seemed as if I had multiple personalities, well, actually only two. There was Hank Cooper the thrill-seeking smuggler, the guy who had started out looking for excitement. The odd thing about this Hank Cooper was that, even though he was scared shitless 99% of the time, he stayed with it for 15 years. Why would I put myself through that?

I finally figured it was like being on a roller coaster. You're terrified during the ride, but when it's over, you realize it was so exhilarating you want to get right back on and do it again.

An adaptation of the old saying – the greater the risk, the greater the return – except substitute "thrill" for "return."

Then there's Hank Cooper the invincible smuggler, who, against all odds, eluded death and long-term incarceration for 15 years. As this Hank Cooper, I would often feel like a puppet on a string, being controlled and manipulated by forces outside my control. I frequently operated almost unconsciously, as if propelled along by some invisible force. How do I account for this Hank Cooper?

Then I came across the fact that the day of Shalom Cohen's death and my birth coincided and thought, "What if reincarnation is at the root of all this?"

Whether you buy this explanation or not, there's no denying that my making it through 15 years of cocaine and heroin smuggling and then a severe addiction is nothing short of uncanny.

Or supernatural.

So perhaps the soul of great grandfather Shalom Cohen did transmigrate to me at birth and has kept

me safe and alive for all this time.

Then again – maybe I was smuggling with Jesus.

Dr. Neumann, after many years of giving me weekly methadone treatments he was fascinated listening to my smuggling stories. He not only thought that my 15-year journey was unbelievable and almost unearthly, but that, by my surviving it, I must have been meant for something, that I've been saved for some purpose. Whether that's true, who knows? And if it is, who'll be running the show? – Me, Shalom Cohen or Jesus?

Time will tell. Maybe.

Every once in a while, I'm asked if I'd ever go back to drug smuggling again. Given what I've been through – the nonstop anxiety, the imprisonments, the addiction, the five years of methadone treatment – why would I?

So, I tell people, "Absolutely not. Once was enough."

BUT IN THE BACK OF MY MIND, I ALWAYS REMEMBER – I CAN NEVER SAY NO.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Not many people go from being raised as an orthodox Jew to becoming an international drug smuggler. Hank Cooper, a Canadian who grew up in Toronto, traveled that path. After becoming an adult (chronologically, at least), in the nineteen seventies and eighties, Hank lived anything but what his parents would have called a normal life during his twenties and early thirties. Maybe it had something

to do with his orthodox Jewish upbringing, but then again it probably was a combination of a million other things, especially luck, which he discusses in his memoir, Smuggling with Jesus.

Based on a series of events that formed Hank Cooper's life, Smuggling with Jesus resembles a work of fiction or a TV movie-of-the-week, but everything in this memoir is exactly as it happened with no need to exaggerate. Only Hank, with his eye for detail, sardonic approach to the world around him, and capacity for self-reflection, could tell the story of his wild ride with a drug smuggling character named Bernie, who may or may not have been the reincarnation of Jesus. Hank and Bernie's wild ride included cocaine smuggling, Uzi-brandishing drug lords, sex, celebrities, rock and roll, corrupt law enforcement officials, and exotic places Hank couldn't believe he was visiting. The wild ride ended when the birth of his son suddenly turned Hank into a grown-up.

Smuggling with Jesus is appearing at the right time: Drug smuggling and drug use – and their consequences – hit the headlines almost daily, a Mexican drug lord was recently apprehended, and the nineteen seventies and eighties are now almost ancient history ready to be described to a new generation. Hank's potential audience includes his baby boomer contemporaries who might be thinking, "There but for the grace of God go I," millennials who won't be able to believe Hank's transactions took place without the assistance of electronic devices, psychologists who will scratch

their heads as they wonder what made Hank and Bernie tick!!!

Born an Orthodox Jew, Canadian Hank Cooper never believed his seemingly “normal” life would become anything else… until the lure of the 1970’s and 1980’s drug scene led him in a dangerous direction.
Soon, he found himself – either intentionally or naively – colluding with Jesus, but not the one Judeo Christians would recognize. This Jesus was a known drug lord with a long history of living life on the edge and destroying any notion of law-abiding citizenship in the process.
Hank’s story could have ended badly, but even amid despair and deliberate bad choices, he found a savior in Bernie, a man who saved him from himself and from the life he was living.

Follow Hank’s journey as he deviates from his life’s plan and miraculously finds his way to a better, brighter future. His life story proves that sometimes a dead end isn’t necessarily the end of the road.